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THE INCOGNITO;

OR,

SINS AND PECCADILLOES.

BY

DON T. DE TRUEBA,

AUTHOR OF "ROMANCE OF HISTORY, SPAIN," "THE CASTILIAN,"
&c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

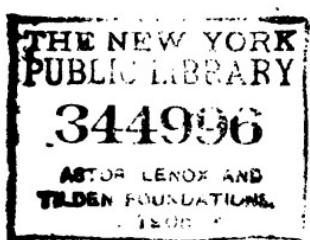
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1831.



ROY WILLIAM
OLIVER
WADDELL

THE INCOGNITO;

OR,

SINS AND PECCADILLOES.

CHAPTER I.

DOUBTS.

"Do you know, countess, that I really tremble lest that Verdeflor should be playing the fool with us!"

"I have told you that your apprehensions are groundless, and you may rely upon my superior knowledge of his character."

"Well, well, but the sort of liberties he takes with my daughter-in-law, that is to be, are far from being agreeable."

"Trifling, without any consequence—they are old friends—besides, Verdeflor adopts the same tone and manner with every female with whom he is acquainted, who is not particularly ugly, or past forty-five. But to speak of our important affair—"

"Ay, now I am all attention, my dear countess: when think you my nomination will appear in the *Gazeta*?"

"Our affairs are in excellent train, the minister very favourably inclined towards you, but we must have patience."

"Patience! countess, consider if I have been wanting in patience. Holy Job's could not be more enduring; but then I must tell you candidly, that I feel exceedingly apprehensive—"

"On what account?"

"Why these disturbances at the *Isla de Leon*; and the symptoms of revolution discernible everywhere, make me tremble for—"

"The peace and tranquillity of Spain?"

"No, for my post of *Tesorero-general*. Should a change

of ministry also take place with a change of government, it would be extremely annoying. God only knows what the result might be with respect to me."

"Don't trouble yourself," said the countess, "about that for the present, for a matter of more momentous importance claims our attention; you seem almost to forget that the greatest obstacle towards our plan remains yet to be removed."

"How is that, countess? Verdeflor consents."

"Well, but we don't know how the orphan may receive your proposals—you must use great tact and discretion."

"I know I must—what think you would be the best way to begin?—Shall I storm furiously, and frighten the orphan into giving her consent, by enlarging upon her black ingratitude and want of respect?"

"No, by no means, that may spoil all.—It appears you know but little of our sex, Don Marcos, if you think those the most efficacious means to employ in similar occasions—a young woman is not to be conquered by threats, but wearied out and teased into compliance by apparent persevering kindness."

"You understand these things better, and I shall implicitly abide by your counsel; to-morrow I will depart for Aranjuez, and settle this business, I hope, to our mutual satisfaction."

Don Marcos Cabezon then withdrew, full of the interesting matter which absorbed his mind. As to his son, he had not considered it expedient to bestow a word on him concerning his designs; and he resolved not to acquaint him with the orphan's marriage until it had been celebrated.

CHAPTER II.

UNWELCOME INTELLIGENCE.

EVENING was just closing, when a muffled man knocked gently at a miserable door in *El Avapiés*; cautiously he was let in, and found himself in the presence of the individual he sought.

"Heaven keep you, Zurdo!" was the visiter's salutation

"What, Señor Enriquez, is it you? Well, I was beginning to be alarmed for your health," said El Zurdo, with a sardonic grin. "Tis now so long since my eyes have been blessed with your presence. Indeed my anxiety had become so great, that I was determined to go after you to-morrow. You come very aptly to relieve my mind."

"Thank you, my friend," replied Enriquez, with a malignant smile. "Thou seest I do not forget thee."

"Well, where's the money?" said El Zurdo, abruptly.

"There, you are always so eager and so suspicious!"

"None of your palaver, Señor Enriquez—where's the money, I say? for by the Holy Virgin I swear I will no longer be trifled with—my patience is tired; the money—the money."

"Take it then, avaricious, ungrateful wretch—take it," cried Enriquez, spitefully, throwing a purse scornfully on the ground.

El Zurdo, his eyes glistening with sullen satisfaction, leisurely stooped to take it up; then having examined the contents—

"Blessed Virgin?" he exclaimed; "what paltry pittance is here—why there is not a *doblone* withal—now, Señor Enriquez, do you take me for a spiritless, beggarly wretch, a vile pauper, to put up with this affront? By Saint Joseph, I will not; my services are entitled to a very different reward."

"And how often hast thou, wretch, extorted rewards for the commission of guilt which thou callest services? Methinks the most abandoned desperate villain's avarice would have been satisfied by this time. Consider the money thou hast upon several occasions received from me."

"God defend us!" exclaimed El Zurdo; "it is pleasant to hear you talk in this manner, when it is chiefly to my co-operation in your iniquities that you owe every thing that you are worth—well, you know my disposition, there is not a more ready or a better fellow to deal with, when a man has a mind to do the thing handsomely as becomes a gentleman; but likewise no fellow is more apt to resent niggardly conduct on the part of his employer. Now you understand me clearly—I must have more money—a solitary *doblone* will not do, Señor Enriquez. "I love to see *doblones*, keeping together in clusters, and in good fellowship—so be pleased to let out a couple more."

"Why, Zurdo, how thou talkest! If I were an *Indiano*, freshly imported from Mexico or Lima, your demands could not be more absurd and exorbitant. Where am I to find the money you require?"

"In your pocket, to be sure," answered El Zurdo, grinning. "But please yourself, señor. If you think the trouble and perplexity of keeping a secret are only worth a *doblone*, you are foolishly mistaken. I feel a prodigious inclination to blab. It is all I can do to maintain my tongue under control; how this task may be continued with the assistance of your paltry presents, I cannot tell, but—"

"Enough, thou wretch! I am disgusted with hearing thy repeated threats."

"Come then," said El Zurdo, extending his hand; "give me the two brothers of this sparkling fellow, and let us have no more words about the matter."

"Two *doblones* more!" muttered Enriquez.

"What is that to a man who can command so much money as you can, from a kind mistress? Besides, if you are generous for once in your life—I will treat your ear with something very interesting."

Enriquez pricked up at these words, and looked inquiringly into the villain's face.

"What is it, Zurdo?" he demanded, in an anxious tone. "Thy intelligence never forbodes me any good. But let me hear."

"First, answer me one single question—does your memory never take the pains of travelling far back into the road of time?"

"No? I make very little use of memory in that way; besides, it is not the quality in the greatest request with me."

"You are discreet, Señor Enriquez. I see that you do not relish this disagreeable sort of travelling. At all events, notwithstanding such little exercise of your memory, you cannot have forgotten the principal foundation upon which our valuable and tender friendship is cemented."

"Perhaps not—nor do I care—I am not troubled with pusillanimous visitations," replied Enriquez, with irony; "as some other very bold desperadoes are apt to be sometimes."

"If you mean that as an aspersion on my part, Señor, let me tell you that Ramon el Zurdo is a man who will never flinch from flesh and blood, whatever he may do from

unearthly things. Heaven defend me, but I forgot you had no conscience ! you believe in nothing."

" When thou speakest, that may be the case, but what wouldest thou now impart ? some ridiculous story of superstitious imaginings, I'll venture to swear."

" I know not what you consider superstitious imaginings, but I would solemnly swear with my hand upon the gospel, that I clearly saw—"

" What ?—whom hast thou seen ?" inquired Enriquez, eagerly.

" Even the spectre of our—your victim."

To this intelligence Enriquez answered with a laugh of derision.

" I thought as much—now, Zurdo when wilt thou learn to be a man, and dismiss from thy mind those idle fancies and ridiculous fears good enough to amuse an old *beata* over her chocolate—or to force naughty children into good behaviour, but utterly misplaced and contemptible in a man of thy complexion and character. The spectre of our victim indeed ! and when wert thou favoured with this singular and agreeable visit ?"

" Treat the matter as lightly as you please, señor, but as I hope for salvation, I saw the man—I mean the ghost—last *noche buena*. I was engaged in a feud with Pizpierno, an affair which by-the-by remains yet to be settled—well, as I was on the point of sending the Pizpierno's soul to the other world, that of your victim came into this, just as if to prevent the fulfilment of my design. But it will not do ; Pizpierno must pay for his insolence, so our blessed Lady protect me."

" And what words didst thou address to thy strange visiter ?"

" None—that was no time for speaking—as soon as I perceived his tall figure coming towards me—with a cadaverous face—a fixed, unearthly look—and a huge flaming brand in his hand, I hastily crossed myself and took to my heels,—nay, this I confess without shame, for my courage is so well known, that I defy any man living, though I will never meddle with the dead !"

" On *noche buena*, thou sayest this probable scene took place ?" demanded Enriquez.

" Yes, about one in the morning ; we had just finished our *bayle*, and—"

"Enough, I see how the case stands."

"Well, Señor Enriquez, and what's your opinion?"

"That thou hadst made rather too free with thy potations, and the fumes of the wine made thee see what there was not."

"What mean you, señor? I am no drunkard; I was then as cool and composed as I am at present."

"A probable story this! when thou hast been telling me about a certain quarrel with Pizpierno."

"Then you must learn," said El Zurdo, gravely, "that I am a man to be always cool and composed, even in my quarrels."

"Well, allowed; so nothing discomposes you but the sight of a ghost—a fine fellow thou art—but a ghost! Well, remember to give my respects to his spectral worship, when next thou art favoured with another visit."

"A curse on your profane tongue," muttered El Zurdo, sullenly, "such irreverent jesting is nowise to my taste."

After this the two worthy associates separated at the entrance of the wretched house. Enriquez retired to the Countess of Belprado's, leaving El Zurdo not a little scandalized at his reckless indifference about ghostly visitations. It must be allowed that El Zurdo was the most conscientious cut-throat, the most pious villain of *El Atapés*; however flagrant his crimes, however dark and long the catalogue of his offences, he never was guilty of omission in the external practices of religion. He attended mass regularly, went to confession, never forgot to take holy water, and carried on his breast the *escapulario** de la Virgen del Carmen. His belief in ghosts and miracles was very strong, and next to the pleasure of easing a man of his money, nothing delighted him so much as to hear some celebrated friar preach. After El Zurdo had expended a sufficient number of round curses and pious ejaculations upon the incredulity and lightness of Enriquez, he happened to remember that his profane comrade had removed himself without bestowing the two demanded *doblones*. This was provoking, and El Zurdo had soon at hand a liberal supply of fresh oaths and curses, with a profusion of which he vowed signal vengeance on Enriquez, unless he found him more generous upon their next meeting.

This being arranged, El Zurdo considered that it was a

* Silk-printed image.

remarkably fine night for valorous and villainous adventures ; a most agreeable darkness pervaded Madrid. Not a single star was visible, and besides, the friendly wind had conveniently put out the few lights scattered about the metropolis. Here was certainly a night not to be lost in idleness and sleep. El Zurdo knew well the immense value of nights like these, and accordingly having lighted his cigar, and enveloped himself in his long cloak, he sallied out on a nocturnal expedition.

CHAPTER III.

EL ZURDO traversed the labyrinth of the little narrow streets about *El Arenal* with a hasty precipitation, as there was little or nothing to be got about these places ; he then for some time patrolled the long street of Toledo and the neighbouring places, after that he repaired to his favourite haunts and stations, but all without success. Indeed, the darkness and the wind were such as to offer no temptation for any one to lose a moment in the street.

The convent of San Felipe Neri had chimed the hour of midnight, and El Zurdo was surprised and chagrined that he had as yet had no opportunity of signalizing his prowess and skill. Nothing was to be perceived moving about, save a random beggar, some stray old women, or a few gentlemen of his own profession. When at length some game was descried, it came always in groups, and so well armed and prepared, that El Zurdo, instead of taking any thing away, was obliged to bestow upon them a Christian salutation. This want of occupation ruffled sorely the temper of the *manolo*, already provoked by the disappointment of the two *doblones*. As a last resource he now withdrew to a very advantageous post near the Puerta de Toledo ; but to his unspeakable surprise and vexation, he found it already tenanted by a prior member of his calling, and according to the regulations he could not pretend to dislodge the first occupier of the place. However, some arrangement might be

made, should the prior gentleman be so inclined, by which a share of dangers and profits might be agreed upon. With this idea, El Zurdo advanced towards his gallant brother of the craft, and when conveniently near—

“*Camarada,*” he said, in a playful tone, “a boisterous night this. Blessed Virgin! the wind will run away with our cloaks if we do not look sharply after ourselves. What think you, brother, of our joining in mutual defence—a goodly association it will be likely to prove, eh?”

“I will have nothing to do with you,” answered, in a very decided, surly tone, the first tenant of the place.

“Here’s politeness to a gentleman!—be pleased to tell me what your objections can be,” returned El Zurdo, rather piqued.

“No, I don’t choose to say a word more.”

“I don’t choose! why, señor, you speak like a king—but, so heaven bless me, I think I recognise your gallant person—the tone of your voice too is the same—by your arrogance I should presume you are Pizpierno.”

“And by the same token I am sure you are El Zurdo. Yes, I am the Pizpierno—I never deny my name; and what then?”

“Why, only that in such a case I am freed from using further ceremony—so please to remove.”

“Remove! what say you, señor?”

“Leave the place!”

“Indeed!”

“Decamp.”

“Jesus, que viento!”*

“Vanish immediately. I say it for the last time.”

“You might have spared yourself even what you have already said.”

After this Pizpierno spit on the ground, and turned upon his heel with an easy swagger—decided symptoms of contempt among such gentry. The choler of El Zurdo, already excited by his disappointments and old quarrel with Pizpierno, was now wrought to the highest, by the contumelious behaviour of his adversary. He advanced nearer, and posting himself with a firm stand and very picturesque attitude before Pizpierno, in the gayety of concentrated rage, calmly said,

* Lord, what a wind!

"Is your instrument finely edged?"

"Beautifully so; and yours, camarada?"

"The same—are you ready for sport? the night is rather raw, and this pastime may serve to keep us warmer."

"I think so too—and accept your invitation. I owe you much good-will."

"It is no favour, *camarada*. I suspect our obligations are mutual."

No more was said, but they now, at a brisk pace, withdrew to a spot near the *Puerta de Toledo*. The place was dismally lonely. Not a living thing was discernible, and the gloomy silence that brooded over it was only interrupted by the regular and monotonous knell of the clocks, the howlings of the wind, or similar sounds.

"A delightful retired spot is this," said El Zurdo.

"I agree with you in opinion," answered Pizpierno, coolly.

"But a question, before we commence," returned El Zurdo—"how are the affairs of your soul?—have you said your prayers?—the trip you are going to take, you know?"

"Zurdo," interrupted Pizpierno, "have you said yours? Mayhap you may set out upon the journey a little before me—now you are in time to say a *responso*—"

"For the repose of your soul, I suppose? Now we are prepared—you have no commands for Curra?"

"Curse your boasting, and get ready," fiercely cried Pizpierno.

They now folded their capas round their left arms, and coolly drew from their sides their *cuchillos*, which were concealed in their *ceñidores*, or waistbands; they opened the fearful broad blades, and then retreated a few paces and began their barbarous combat. Furiously they ran against each other, but in spite of the darkness, their skill baffled for some time the murderous intentions of the foes—their caps were almost rent to pieces with the repeated stabs and cuts which they received—and the two infuriate *manolos* became more and more enraged as the contest was protracted. They now fiercely closed with each other and set about dealing their blows with fearful rapidity. In a short time a hollow, painful groan was uttered, and one of the men fell heavily to the ground. The other stood calmly beside him, as if in expectation that he would rise; but the fallen man evinced no symptoms of wishing to renew the contest.

"Seor Pizpierno," said the upright *manolo*, coolly, "you have soon got tired of the exercise. Shall I help you to rise?"

"Zurdo," feebly answered Pizpierno, "may the blessed Virgin protect me! I can rise no more—it is a most capacious door that you have opened to my soul. I have not five minutes to live—here's a gap as large as a church-entrance."

"Are you sure, Pizpierno?—then Heaven forgive you your sins! At all events, you have shown yourself a good *manolo*, and your *cuchillo* is a fine blade—you have completely spoiled my capa. I feel a scratch in my arm too."

The wounded man now struggled on the ground; a gurgling sound issued from his throat, and uttering a hollow and prolonged groan he expired.

"*Requiescat in pace*," said El Zurdo, solemnly, as soon as he had ascertained that his adversary was no more. His own personal safety was next the most important subject under consideration. Should the *ronda** happen to pass by that place, he was not sure he would feel pleased at the circumstance, and to take to his heels was not the only precaution necessary to ensure his safety. His flight could by no means bring Pizpierno back to life, and as long as he remained lifeless in an exposed situation, there was danger for his conqueror, as many of the *manolos* were acquainted with the feud between them. Many of the honourable tribe would certainly not inform against their brave brother; but then when a man has committed some desperately fine thing, such, for example, as sending a fellow-creature *ad patres*, I believe he is not disposed to place much confidence even in friends, with regard to the said fine achievement.

El Zurdo, therefore, judiciously considered it was indispensable to remove the corpse without loss of time. He accordingly loaded himself with the dead weight of his adversary, and not without much pains and difficulty he at last succeeded in bearing it to the banks of the river Manzanares. He pondered for a moment whether it would not be very politic to throw it into the river, that by next morning it might either be carried away or sunk. But the river Manzanares most provokingly refused to lend itself to the nefarious scheme of El Zurdo. It so happened that at that

* Patrol.

moment the famous river had not sufficient water where-withal to drown a sparrow, much less to cover the murderous freak of the *manolo*. Indeed, notwithstanding the season of the year, the Manzanares exhibited such very uncommon symptoms of dryness for a thing called a river, that a child might cross it without much danger, not of being drowned, but of catching cold. El Zurdo bestowed a hearty curse on the waterless river, and thought, no doubt, with many others who are not desirous of concealing dead bodies, that it was indisputably a piece of great folly and presumption in the Manzanares to assume the title of river, seeing that many other more deserving beings of the species had humbly contented themselves with the more modest denomination of brooks, rills, and rivulets. El Zurdo finding that he could not accommodate his dead comrade with a watery grave, next bethought himself of bestowing upon him the functions of burial—the ground by the side of the river being very soft and sandy, he could accomplish the task without much difficulty. Previous, however, to committing the mortal spoils of Pizpierno to his mother earth, his conqueror, parson, and sexton—the brave El Zurdo—very rationally considered it would be quite as well to ease the corpse of those mundane articles which are of no use whatever in the other world, though of immense service in this.

Preparatory therefore to the funeral obsequies of the dead *manolo*, he began a scrupulous research into his pockets. He found a box with tobacco, flint, and tinder, a dollar, and two or three copper coins, a *romance de ciego*,* a rusty knife, and a torn kerchief. Now these trifles, together with the hat, cloak and shoes of the deceased, El Zurdo very justly considered as due to him for expenses of burial; he was, however, considerate enough to leave on the dead man a fine *escapulario*, which, being a spiritual ornament, was certainly of more use to Pizpierno in his present state, than the worldly accoutrements above specified.

"May the Virgin bless you," said El Zurdo, as he proceeded to the ritual, "this is a beautiful *escapulario* indeed! I have a mind to exchange it—no, no, I cannot endure such a profanation."

He then dug, or rather scraped up the soft mould, and having made a suitable excavation, he threw the corpse in,

* Ballad, such as are sung by blind beggars.

and carefully covered it over. He next mumbled a sort of a prayer, and having thus finished these impromptu funeral rites, he very leisurely returned to his dwelling.

After the solemn office he had been performing, his mind was in no mood for his nocturnal pursuits. Indeed there had been quite enough of adventure for one night ; he accordingly said his prayers and calmly composed himself to sleep. This seraphic peace of mind which rejected not the slumber of El Zurdo, was far from falling to the share of Enriquez, for at the time that the first was giving very unequivocal and sonorous testimonies of slumber, the latter continued restless in his bed during the whole night. He was not afflicted with visionary terrors, or dismal forebodings, supplied by spectres or any other messengers from the grave. Enriquez had a tone of mind superior to such vulgar prejudices, but he was troubled and perplexed with a speculation of real danger and misery to him. After he had quitted El Zurdo, laughing immoderately at the *manolo's* belief in ghosts, and congratulating himself upon the *doblones*, which the said belief was the means of keeping together in his pocket, he was returning home, when accidentally meeting an acquaintance, he followed him into a *café*, as it was as yet early in the evening, and his mistress kept late hours. He sat himself gayly to some refreshments, when two strangers came in who seated themselves at a retired table. Enriquez gave an involuntary start at their appearance, and one of them, an elderly noble-looking man, powerfully attracted his attention. The more he looked upon the individual, the more anxious and restless he grew.

"What ails you, Enriquez?" inquired his companion, "you seem ill at ease."

"Nonsense, you fancy so," replied Enriquez, with an assumption of indifference.

"Indeed it is no fancy, for since the arrival of those two gentlemen, you keep constantly moving in your chair—besides, your eyes are now fixed upon them."

"Why, to tell you the truth," returned Enriquez, affecting composure, "one of them, the youngest, resembles amazingly a cousin of mine who died some years ago ; his sudden appearance could not but create this emotion. Stay, I must approach the stranger."

"What signifies his resemblance, if you are positive that the cousin is dead?"

"Why, that's true, but 'tis a curiosity, a whim I must indulge."

He rose from his seat and strolled unconcernedly about the *café*, but the more he looked upon the retired visitors, the more his fearful apprehensions were confirmed. He approached close to their table, and every remaining doubt withered from his mind. It was not, however, the younger of the two individuals that had awakened his amazement, nor any resemblance existing between him and the supposed cousin—no, this was an evasion given to his prying acquaintance, for it was the elder of the two strangers who had caused his sudden anxiety.

The fears of Enriquez being now fully confirmed, he again retired to his seat, and with feigned levity of manner—

"Well, it is strange," he said, "how that young man resembles my dead relation!"

He then affected to talk on different topics for some minutes with much composure, and looking at his watch, he pretended to be wanted at home, and abruptly left the *café*. As soon as he found himself unobserved by dangerous witnesses, he gave vent to the throbbing emotions that agitated his breast.

"Yes—'tis he—'tis my victim! as that rascal, El Zurdo, calls him—not his spectre, as he fancied, but alive! Oh, horror! how came he here?—he was dead—dead! What mystery is this? I am lost if—but no—no, why should I tremble, I am secure against all danger. He cannot discover himself—proscribed—condemned as he is. And should the partisans of the Constitution prevail, he perhaps is one of them. What course can I adopt in this perilous situation? I have advanced so far, I cannot, must not retreat. I shall narrowly watch his movements; he and I cannot live in security—he must die—'tis resolved; let me ponder on the means of carrying my resolution into effect!"

It is almost needless to add that the person who caused this dreadful emotion in Enriquez was the mysterious *hidalgo*.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRIP TO ARANJUEZ.

IN pursuance of his resolution, Don Marcos Cabezon set out early in the morning for Aranjuez. During the journey he was congratulating himself upon the masterly policy he had displayed in the various stages of the matrimonial transaction. He goodnaturedly gave himself credit for a large share of sagacity, and was persuaded the affair would be brought to a most happy conclusion. He had spoken not a word to his son respecting his intended journey. This prudent step he had deemed indispensable, and he certainly was right, for Carlos would of course have opposed some terrible stumblingblock to the *banquero's* triumphant progress, a danger which was not now to be apprehended.

Carlos had been invited to spend the day with some friends, and before he could become aware of the intended scheme, the blow would have been struck. Don Marcos too had taken the precaution of making sure of Verdeflor ; he would by no means trust to the young gentleman's promises that he would follow the next day. He knew the greatest risk might be incurred by his stay at Madrid. Don Marcos, therefore, with that alacrity and promptness of which we have already favoured the reader with a sample, hastened to Verdeflor, whom he found in bed.

" Up, up, my young friend, what laziness is this ? "

" Heaven forgive you, Don Marcos, for your inhumanity in thus breaking the rest of a poor fellow who has not been three hours in bed. What in the name of mercy do you want now ? "

" Want ! a pretty question to ask a man, when you know we are to be at Aranjuez to-day. Get up quick."

" True, I remember ! but could we not postpone the journey ? any other day would do as well, I suppose."

" You suppose wrong ; come, get up—consider the advantages you are to derive from this expedition."

" You are wonderfully kind, *banquero*,—so it is merely my welfare that you have at heart ? "

"Yours and mine to be sure—services you must know ought to be reciprocal. You shall see your wife to-day—so make haste."

"There's a temptation to make a man abandon his repose, certainly—well, have it your own way ; but I assure you, Don Marcos, you have dissolved the most enchanting vision that ever blessed mortal man."

Verdeflor at length got up, but not so quick as to suit the impatience of the *banquero*, who kept pressing him as he was making his toilet. All his expostulations, however, were thrown away ; the young coxcomb, seeing his impatience, most provokingly took his leisure, to enjoy his old friend's fidgets. He had some comment to pass on every article of his dress, which called for anecdotes of tailors, shoemakers, hairdressers, &c., all of whom Don Marcos very piously wished that moment at the bottom of the Red Sea.

Verdeflor having tantalized and wearied the impatient *banquero* for the space of an hour, now condescended to accompany him ; and off they set on the road to Aranjuez. Don Marcos was again in high spirits, and in the satisfaction of his soul, he admired every object that struck his view, however trivial or ordinary. Then he launched into great encomiums on the appearance of the surrounding country, which, by-the-by, is the most monotonous, unpicturesque perspective that can well be imagined ; but when a man is in good humour, every thing he sees is worthy of admiration.

"My dear friend," he said, "is not this scenery delightful?"

"Very, upon my word, Don Marcos, I never supposed you were so good a *connoisseur* in these matters. It is enchanting, and, for a view in the vicinity of the capital, there is something extremely original about it. I should imagine that only the capitals in Africa could boast of scenery equal to that which surrounds Madrid."

"Well, I think so too," replied the *banquero*, very gravely, and perfectly ignorant of the satire implied ; "there are some beautiful spots in Africa."

"Delightful," returned Verdeflor, "especially at Sahara."

"Yes, that's the place I mean," retorted Don Marcos.

Here Verdeflor, who never thought it conducive to health to restrain his natural propensities, gave free vent to his risibility.

Don Marcos stared, for he really saw no cause for such boisterous mirth.

" Well, Verdeflor, what motive is there for this merriment ?"

" Oh, I am laughing at a fool I saw yesterday at the Marchioness of Montechico's, and upon my word, can you imagine, *banquero*, that he resembled you prodigiously.. I beg your pardon—I am rather free, but you know that is my way ; besides, we cannot help ourselves, if nature happen to make us with a strong likeness to a fool."

Another explosion of astounding laughter closed up the consoling remark ; a remark Don Marcos found exceedingly unbecoming, and of which, accordingly, he lost no time in expressing his disapprobation. In a very pompous, crusty tone, he then began :—

" Verdeflor, I think you might have spared yourself this silly talk—it is highly indecorous, and does not suit my taste."

" But, my most revered Don Marcos, I give you my word I said it not with an idea of—"'

" Of offending me—well, that's an apology."

" You quite mistake. I said it not with an idea of suiting your taste ! it was a thing that struck me at the moment."

" But I see no connexion between our remarks on Africa, and the fool you saw at the Marchioness of Montechico's."

" I do, a prodigious one. I cannot, however, let you into all my information—no, no, that would not do. Oh! here we are at Valdemoro. Shall we breakfast here, or pass at one sweep to Aranjuez ? We shall get but indifferent fare in this old place."

" It is past eleven—let us alight."

The business of breakfast was soon despatched, and they proceeded on their journey with redoubled vigour, for Don Marcos was very anxious to have the business settled. When they arrived at Aranjuez they were surprised to see symptoms of unusual excitement, considering the time of the year and the retired habits of the inhabitants. Groups of people were observed walking in earnest conversation, and suspicious looks and murmurs of alarm were everywhere heard and seen. Don Marcos inquired of a peasant who was going by the reason of these extraordinary demonstrations.

" The Lord protect us !" quoth the peasant. " Terrible things have happened at Ocana—fifty thousand Englishmen have already arrived, and the place is in a state of commotion."

"Fifty thousand Englishmen!" cried Verdeflor, "what, did they drop from the clouds?"

"Well, Englishmen or otherwise, they are foreigners, or at least freemasons, which comes to the same; and there is the Count Abisbal joining them, and proclaiming the constitution."

Saying this, the peasant proceeded on his route.

"I see how it is," said Verdeflor; "Abisbal, who was sent against the constitutionalists of the south, has no doubt thought it would be folly to undergo the fatigue of the journey, and therefore—"

"Well," cried Don Marcos; "but his conduct is shameful."

"Pooh—pooh!" returned Verdeflor. "He once served those he now joins a very ugly trick, and now he wants to make friends; ere long he'll act otherwise; the count is a very accommodating man."

"Now, Verdeflor," said Don Marcos, with a serious and portentous grimace, "I do not like these changes. I somehow apprehend that I shall derive no benefit from them. If the king is once persuaded to swear to the constitution, how am I to become a *Tesorero-general*? I suppose there will be a change of ministry?"

"No doubt; but would you object to take office under the constitution?"

"Not in the least, my friend. I merely wish to serve my country in the capacity of *Tesorero-general*, without troubling my head about the form of government."

"You are a prudent man, Don Marcos, and very disinterested withal, since you sacrifice your private opinions to the good of your country."

Don Marcos was well pleased with this mock compliment, bestowed on the supposed sacrifice, which indeed well merited the compliment, though, to the honour of patriots let it be proclaimed, that the compliment loses much of its worth, from the circumstance of those sort of sacrifices being anything but scarce. Men have in general a wonderful propensity to serve their country, by goodnaturedly encumbering themselves with the duties of office. Besides, there is not a single man, from the highest to the lowest, who has not some very pathetic and interesting narrative to tell about his sacrifices. It is really a matter of surprise how some countries do not thrive faster, seeing the immense sacrifices that indi-

viduals of all sorts and sizes are constantly making for their good and prosperity.

This digression some readers may think is nothing to the purpose : if such be the case, it only keeps up the general character of digressions ; but, not to displease my readers, it is fit we should come to a proper understanding before we proceed any further. Let it therefore be clearly specified that this book is written with a twofold intention, to please our readers, and also to please ourselves. When therefore our tastes do not exactly agree, let the kind or unkind, the gentle or ungentle reader, skip over the passage or page he happens not to find to his liking. By this precaution he may spare himself the expense of many a pish! pooh! pshaw! bah! humph! faugh! and other very expressive exclamations, indicative of the reader's delight and good-will towards the author. We are not extremely selfish, and can easily dispense with the said favour : let the reader therefore keep his stock for the next book that falls into his hands.

Besides, this method of reading with the fingers, instead of the eyes, is admirable, since no one will deny that the former can get over a book much faster than the latter, and this saving of time every one will admit to be a clear advantage. It is therefore to be hoped that the system of finger-reading will, ultimately, be brought to such perfection, as to render the eyes perfectly useless in the operation ; time and sight will both be economized by this means. Indeed it must be said, to the honour of authors in general, that they are using their best endeavours to further such a desirable and beneficial consummation.

Now let us return to Don Marcos—we shall be sure to overtake him.

“ My young friend,” said the *banquero*, “ here we must separate, and you can go to the *posada*, while I proceed to my sister’s dwelling.”

Verdeflor stared, he could not really understand what Don Marcos meant.

“ Separate ! why I thought we came for the purpose of my being introduced to my wife, that is to be ?”

“ Well, that is in truth our business, and therefore I must call previously on my sister in order to prepare.”

“ Your sister—prepare,” repeated the astonished Verdeflor, and then he looked incredulously at the *banquero*. “ Am I to marry your sister ?”

It occurred now to the young fellow that he was to be saddled for life with a sister of old Cabezon, who, certainly considering the age of her brother, could not be a female *de la première jeunesse*. Verdeflor thought this a very fit opportunity for an explanation; and without waiting for a reply—

“Softly, Don Marcos,” he said; “before we proceed any further, let us understand each other. I was made to believe that my wife that is to be was a young beautiful girl. Now, Don Marcos, you have really mistaken your man, if you think to trepan me into a marriage of another kind. I do not mean to call in question the beauties of your sister, but allow me to be rather skeptical on the article of her youth; your own age, Don Marcos, must be—”

“Never mind that,” interrupted the *banquero*.

“But I do mind it—being a plaindealer myself, I expect the same conduct from my friends. I must candidly tell you, therefore, that you have been guilty of a paltry trick. Yes, I do not mince the matter—a paltry, shabby trick.”

It was now the *banquero's* turn to stare; this task he performed to admiration. He opened wide his eyes and mouth, stretched out his hand, &c. Indeed, the *banquero's* capabilities in this way were eminent—he was a thorough good starer.

“Paltry trick!” he exclaimed, after a sufficient quantum of mute astonishment. “Pray sir, what do you mean by that?”

“The meaning is obvious, and my resolution shall be taken accordingly. You must learn that without some previous conversation on the matter, and some necessary explanations, I positively refuse to marry your sister.”

“Marry my sister!” ejaculated Don Marcos, and a fresh supply of staring followed, as matter of course; “and who, in the name of Heaven, wishes you to marry my sister?”

“Why,” replied Verdeflor, with a mock smile, “such an honour was proposed by you.”

We will not follow the mistake further; suffice it to say that it was at length, like every other mistake, cleared up, and the *banquero's* fit of wondering was succeeded by another of the most obstreperous laughter. Having devoted a sufficient time to this cachinatory exercise, Don Marcos desired his young companion to await his return at the inn. It was indispensable to apprise both his sister and the intended wife

with their coming; so as to prepare them for business. The presence of Verdeflor would be not only superfluous but awkward at the first interview, though his presentation was only to be postponed for some hours. The reasonableness of the resolution struck Verdeflor; but he was still more struck at the strange character of the whole transaction. For even to the wild imagination of the young merry madcap, the proceedings of this marriage appeared peculiarly singular; but this was not much against his taste; for he delighted in every thing that was out of the common and ordinary track. As the adventure, too, was extremely new, he felt rather interested in seeing the end of it.

Don Marcos was accordingly suffered to proceed in the affair without further impediment, and Verdeflor promised to await his return at the inn; but as soon as the *banquero's* back was turned he forgot his promise, and began to saunter about the town.

CHAPTER V.

THE SURPRISE.

THE effect produced by the sudden and unexpected appearance of Don Marcos at his sister's dwelling, baffles all description. The notes of exclamation and ejaculation expended by the good *beata* on the occasion, would have served at least for a score of similar ones, when a tolerable expenditure of surprise and astonishment is imperiously demanded. But if Doña Tecla's wonder was so indescribable at the mere appearance of her brother, how shall we express that which she felt when the object of his visit was revealed to her. We should be exceedingly glad to favour our readers with a small specimen of Doña Tecla's exclamations, but really we must humbly confess our inability to execute such an arduous task. To form some faint idea, let the reader carefully collect the astonishment of half a dozen thorough wonderers of the feminine gender, of his own acquaintance.

The *beata*, indeed, was intemperately profuse in this respect, but as her brother had not come all the way from Madrid merely to enjoy the pleasure of the thing, he felt the

prolongation of those tokens excessively inconvenient. He made several efforts to curtail them, which were for some time quite ineffectual. At last he got out of humour—this, indeed, was the best expedient he could hit upon—his dutiful sister afforded some repose to her tongue, and Don Marcos was happy to hear once more the sounds of his own.

"Now, dear Tecla," he said, with appropriate gravity and importance, "the communication which I have thought proper to impart to you excites more surprise than is befitting. If, instead of rolling your eyes, and letting your tongue run so volubly, you will pause to reflect a moment, I am confident you would be struck with the reasonableness and propriety of my plan."

"But, Marcos, you know that Theresa has, with as much piety as discretion, resolved on becoming a nun; and indeed every thing is arranged for so desirable and devout a design."

"How arranged!" exclaimed Cabezon, in alarm. "I hope, sister, you have taken no rash step without my knowledge and approbation? Now, Tecla, what have you presumed to do without my previous concurrence?"

Don Marcos looked awfully grand as he uttered these words, and his sister heard him with proper respect.

"I have done nothing, brother," she answered very mildly.

"Well, what arrangements are those concerning the orphan?"

"The thing is settled. Padre Sinforiano has kindly charged himself with—"

"Padre Sinforiano," interrupted Don Marcos, impatiently, "may spare himself the trouble; for I tell you that Theresa is not to become a nun—that is resolved."

"Holy Virgin! how vehement you are, brother. Calm yourself—no good Christian should yield in this manner to the suggestions of unholy wrath."

"You are enough to provoke a saint, Tecla. I see you have been endeavouring to seduce the orphan—it is shameful, it is—"

"How's this? what ails you, Marcos?" ejaculated the *beata*, kissing her beads and trembling. "It is not long since you yourself approved the girl's resolution, and warmly recommended it to be carried into effect. I have a letter from you, in which—"

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Don Marcos, impatiently, "that

has nothing to do with the actual posture of things. We cannot be always aware of the various changes which may occur in life, and what was prudent and beneficial yesterday may prove the contrary on the morrow."

"Well, I don't understand it," said the *beata*, with perfect simplicity.

"Of course you do not, because you are a foolish woman," gallantly and kindly replied her brother.

It must strike every one that this last argument of Don Marcos was conclusive. Foolish women certainly cannot be supposed to have their understanding particularly bright and clear. But though the justice of the remark may not be controverted, yet it did not occur to Doña Tecla that this was proper language to use to a lady, however deficient her intellectual parts might be. Besides, she felt unwilling to admit that the compliment was applicable to her; and therefore, as she had the nicest sense of justice, she hastened to retort it upon the bestower. Don Marcos being a liberal-minded man, of course would not receive back what he had once given away. On the contrary, much captivated with the shyness evinced by his sister in accepting such favours, he lost no time in pressing fresh ones upon her. This produced a fraternal contest, in which a sharp exchange of the said civilities took place.

Don Marcos presented his sister with "a foolish old woman," this was remunerated with "an egregious ass;" then the brother made his sister a present of an "hypocritical devotee," which she acknowledged by returning that of an "old sinner;" to this kindness the *banquero* answered by an "ugly beldam," and Doña Tecla quickly gave him a "vain, pompous old dotard."

Don Marcos at length annoyed to observe the pertinacity evinced by the *beata* in returning his favours, in which indeed he found that she was quite as liberal as himself, felt mortified to his very soul. Having exhausted his whole stock of civilities of the above description, he now expeditiously betook himself to other stores of which he was master, and which he thought would at once astonish and silence his sister. With this view he thundered out a volley of oaths and curses, which produced a miraculous effect upon the intemperate tongue of the *beata*. She was completely deprived of the power of utterance, and as if to avert the evil tendency of her brother's wicked ejaculations, she kept

crossing herself with the most fervid assiduity. Don Marcos congratulated himself upon his success in checking the *beata's* powers of tongue, and he now thought of pushing his advantages further by putting a stop to her sanctimoniuous pantomime. He put on a very tremendous look, supplied himself with a tolerable share of passion, and seizing the trembling old lady rudely by the arm—

“Desist, Tecla!” he said, fiercely, “I'll have no more of this mummery, there is no occasion for it. You have provoked me already beyond endurance, and if you proceed in this mood, by Heaven, you'll drive me mad.”

This was an awful threat to a tender-hearted sister like Doña Tecla, and the idea of seeing Don Marcos out of his senses presented to her mind something tremendously shocking. The good lady was in a sad plight. She was neither allowed the use of her tongue nor her hands; she was of necessity compelled to confine herself to the family staring system, like her brother. Don Marcos continued: “It is of no use to stare and wonder, like an idiot; the course I am about to pursue is dictated by prudence and justice; the future welfare of Carlos requires this sacrifice on the part of the orphan—she must be taken out of the way, that my son may be united to a lady of rank, and I become a *Tesorero-general*. ”

The strength of this reasoning would be obvious to any sensible man or woman either; but Doña Tecla, though possessing very considerable talents for the above-mentioned sort of repartee, and wonderful abilities for pantomimic beatitude, was far from being a profound logician. This was apparent by the difficulty she had in fully comprehending the arguments of her brother. Don Marcos was again irritated at this slowness of comprehension. But in this he acted unjustly; he ought to have considered that a simple, old, retired *beata* could not be expected to have such profound and correct ideas of life and logic as a great *banquero*, who gave splendid parties, and aspired to be *Tesorero-general*.

“But,” Doña Tecla now attempted to say mildly, “how do you prove that justice requires that the orphan should be compelled to marry against her inclination?”

This was a very silly and impudent remark, and indeed only excusable in a person, who, like Doña Tecla, had a deplorable want of logic. Don Marcos therefore contented

himself with giving no answer but that which all silly and impertinent remarks deserve. This answer consisted in bestowing on the inquirer a look of pity, accompanied by a smile and most expressive shrug of the shoulders.

We have already favoured our readers with some luminous notions on the advantages of finger-reading, and we must now call their attention to the method of answering of which the *banquero* now offered so fine an illustration. Whenever some indiscreet person puts one of those puzzling and awkward questions, which it is difficult to answer by words, let our readers instead of looking foolish, merely betake themselves to the pithy reply contained in the look, the smile, and the shrug. Indeed they will find such shoulder-answering fully as convenient as finger-reading.

Doña Tecla's question being thus satisfactorily disposed of, she, no doubt pleased with the answer, was encouraged to put a second in the shape of asking an opinion.

"But don't you think, Marcos, that your views can quite as well be fulfilled by Theresa's going to a nunnery as by her becoming a wife?"

This second question, rather bearing a show of deference, somewhat propitiated Don Marcos; and this became apparent by the benign and tranquil way in which he took a pinch of snuff, and the polite manner in which he offered his box to Doña Tecla.

"No, my dear sister," he replied, leisurely, applying his handkerchief to his more than ordinary quantity of nose. "No, because—" here he stopped at once to blow his nose, and to raise the expectation of his hearer by the importance of what was coming; nothing, indeed, is more effectual in creating deep attention than a solemn *because*, followed by a tranquilly sonorous blowing of the nose—"No, Tecla," he repeated, putting the handkerchief in his pocket, "because she must be a novice before she can profess, that will take some time, and we have none to lose. As long as there is the smallest glimpse of hope for Carlos, he will not be ruled; the impediment offered by the orphan's marriage, is of course more insurmountable than the obstacle presented by her *noviciate*. Your good sense, Tecla, will tell you that."

Doña Tecla was very well pleased with this appeal to her good sense; and now that she was a woman of sense again, she found no difficulty in understanding the strength of all

her brother's reasonings, which unhappily she could not do while she was a foolish woman. Don Marcos hailed with pleasure these favourable symptoms, and he kindly strove to accomplish her cure by using many soothing and complimentary words. These produced the desired effect : in a short time Doña Tecla's ideas became so luminous that she entered fully into all her brother's views ; she even promised her assistance in convincing Theresa of the prudence and justice of the intended union, should she unfortunately be deficient in comprehension.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE'S SACRIFICE.

THE orphan was then summoned into their presence ; she readily obeyed, little aware of the plot in contemplation against her happiness. From the secret interview between brother and sister, she had been led to conclude that something relating to her future destiny was then being resolved ; but she could not surmise the extraordinary proposition about to be submitted to her.

She entered the apartment with a composed air, and, having made her obeisance to Don Marcos, tranquilly awaited his communication. The collected and dignified deportment of the orphan made the situation of the *banquero* any thing but pleasant. Despite of that copious and ready eloquence for which he was famous, and of which various samples have been given in the course of this history, he found to his great mortification that at this moment he had not a word to say. He wondered where his speech was gone ; he was full of ideas, but could not give them utterance. This is, in sooth, one of the most serious inconveniences attendant on orators, and it was now for the first time that the eloquent *banquero* repented not having learned his speech by rote, as many other great and prudent orators are wont to do. But it was indispensable to begin, and he, therefore, pronounced two very distinct and appropriate hemis, blew his nose sonorously, passed his hand through

his chin magisterially, and in fine, went through the prologomena in a tolerably correct style ; but there again he stuck fast, a long pause followed, and Doña Tecla, who, as we have seen, had fully recovered her good sense, now anticipated that the orator for want of better employment was disposed to go over the prologomena again ; this she considered superfluous, and thought she might help the orator to something new. The orator was very willing to receive any help, and an expressive look which he bestowed on his sister, convinced the good lady that she might supply the audience with a little eloquence of her own without Don Marcos feeling any umbrage at the liberty. She accordingly ventured to begin,

" My dear Theresa, my brother has something of importance to communicate to you."

This oratorical introduction of the subject was most happy, and the *banquero* felt much relieved from his speechless situation. It afforded him a clew, presently he stumbled upon some words, and being determined not to let them escape, he hastened to make use of them.

" Yes, Theresa, my sister speaks truly ; it is something of very great importance, and I hope you will pay due attention to what I am about to say."

" Indeed, sir," said the orphan, modestly, " it is my duty to listen to all your words with that deference and gratitude which is required from an humble *protégée* to her generous protector."

" I am happy to hear that such are your sentiments," resumed Don Marcos ; " for you will find still less difficulty in embracing the proposals I wish to make—intended to forward, both your respectable establishment in the world, and the prosperity of my son."

" Do not be startled, dear child," here interposed Doña Tecla, perceiving the emotion of the orphan. " You know very well that we love you sincerely, and have your welfare at heart."

" You have always been very, very kind to me," answered Theresa, mournfully.

" Yes," resumed Don Marcos, " I do not wish ungenerously to recount my favours, but you must allow that you have invariably been treated more like a member of my family than—"

" Oh, yes ! " eagerly interrupted Theresa, with tears in

ties, "I know the weight of my obligations but too well. A poor houseless, helpless orphan,—I have found in you a second father—a father who hath conferred on me all the obligations incumbent on the first by the laws of nature. Such benefits I shall never be able to repay—but at least I shall never be ungrateful enough to forget them."

"You can repay those benefits," eagerly interposed Don Marcos. "It is in your power now to render me a service, which will fully compensate my family for any kindness bestowed on you. I hope you will have sufficient courage to make an indispensable sacrifice."

"I hope I shall," answered the orphan, smiling sadly, "only name the sacrifice, Don Marcos."

"You must renounce hopes which you ought never to have cherished; my son Carlos is the heir of a great fortune; he is in the way of adding to this advantage those of rank and distinction, by contracting a marriage with a noble family; a brilliant career is opened to him, and the most flattering prospects are also offered to me. On the other hand, you—"

"Do not proceed, señor," interrupted Theresa, "I am fully sensible of my insignificance, and the errors I have committed in allowing my heart to indulge in tender feelings, which, alas! have been productive of such unutterable misery to me."

A flood of tears impeded the sequel of her words. Doña Tecla felt moved, nor was the *banquero* insensible to the sorrows of the poor orphan girl; she, however, soon summoned up her courage, and resolutely wiping her tears, she proceeded with more composure.

"But I know my duty. I shall strictly adhere to its mandates. In a few days the walls of a convent shall shut me out from the world, and thus every impediment be removed which I might offer to the plans of my benefactors."

"My dear Theresa," said Don Marcos, "I applaud your sentiments, but the course you intend to pursue is not sufficient to dispel my fears. Carlos will never renounce his determination until he sees you irrevocably another's."

"What!" exclaimed Theresa in agony,—"I—I marry another—never! No, no, that sacrifice is horrible—criminal: I must not swear at the altar to bestow an affection which is irretrievably placed on another person—this would be perjury."

Her agitation became extreme. Doña Tecla made some

efforts to tranquillize her spirits, and Don Marcos too essayed an attempt at consolation.

"Do not distress yourself so much," he soothingly said. "The man who is destined for your husband is young, amiable, and full of accomplishments. He will make it the study of his life to contribute to your comfort and happiness. For my part, I will neglect no means of showing my kindness to you. I shall regard you as a daughter, and you shall have equipage, jewels, dresses, every thing, in fine, that constitutes the felicity of a woman."

"Alas! sir, you wrong me," said the weeping Theresa, looking Don Marcos mournfully in the face. "I do not merit this treatment. You wrong me, in supposing that the wealth of your son acted as an inducement for the bestowal of my affection—of this sordid guilt, at least, I am innocent, however imprudently I may have acted in other respects."

The tears and evident anguish of the orphan softened the hearts of both her catechisers. But though Don Marcos was affected for the hapless girl, he felt a still greater affection for his own aggrandizement; he accordingly continued the attack with unwearied perseverance. Argument followed upon argument with fearful rapidity, for having once found the use of his speech, the *banquero* felt disposed not to lose it again in a hurry. On her side, Doña Tecla lost no opportunity of throwing in random specimens of her persuasive powers. Placed between two such powerful opponents, it could not be expected that the unfortunate girl should hold out very long. The influence of teasing and worrying is much greater than people are generally aware of.

The *beata* was as thorough a teaser as could be met with in or about Aranjuez—and few men could worry better than the *banquero*, when he was in a humour for it. Indeed, between brother and sister, they might lay a wager to drive any girl, situated as Theresa was, perfectly mad. Nothing could be more tormenting than the persuasive tenderness and the endearing words of Doña Tecla. Nothing was capable of inflicting keener pangs than the prosy kindness, and the insulting promises of Don Marcos. With such powerful means, it is not to be wondered at that they ultimately succeeded in persuading the poor girl to comply with their wishes. Indeed there was no other alternative left her, after the two hours' lecture of the fraternal duo, but to be fairly convinced, or to throw herself out at the window in a fit of madness.

The fraternal tormentors had now nearly exhausted their breath, and completely worn out the patience of their victim, when, to their great joy, they perceived in her some symptoms of relenting. She no longer met their arguments, that is, importunities, with ready answers, but allowed them to talk on at their good will and pleasure. Don Marcos did certainly feel a lively pleasure in hearing himself talk, and in seeing that he had silenced his adversary's opposition. So far the work of convincing was done—and next the persuading part of the business was to be performed. This the *banquero* flattered himself would soon be effected by a few additional doses of prosing.

After a short repose to recover breath, brother and sister set again to the task with redoubled vigour and spirits. Never could a couple of bull-dogs have performed their part better. The excruciating tortures of the devoted girl cannot be described—her situation was really awful. Indeed, were I a woman, to be rescued from such a situation, I would marry twenty times over. Oh heavens! the horror of such trials! The unfortunate Theresa at length sunk under the repeated attacks of the tender executioners—for a moment she clasped her hands, and fixed her eyes intensely on the ground, a bitter smile curled her lip, an unearthly paleness covered her countenance—then, with a sudden burst of agony, she cried:

" 'Tis well—I am ready to obey. I may not survive such horrors—but no one shall accuse me of having impeded the happiness of Carlos. Oh! Carlos, where, where art thou?"

She could say no more, but uttering a piercing scream, fell senseless on the floor: the two persecutors, like most others when their work is done, sympathized with her sorrow, and proffered their aid to revive her. Don Marcos was not a little gratified to have carried his point. True it was at the expense of the horrible, unredeemable misery, perhaps the death, of a lovely and virtuous being—but Don Marcos very philosophically announced to his sister that those fits would pass away.

"Poor young thing!" he exclaimed, pathetically, "she is really much affected, but she will recover in time—and believe me, Tecla, the day will come when she will thank us for this—though it now seems cruel unkindness."

"Amen!" answered the *beata*, piously.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOG.

DON MARCOS CABEZON retired from the interview highly elated with the success of his enterprise. He hastened to the inn in order to communicate the joyful tidings to Verdeflor ; to his great annoyance he found that the husband, that was to be, had forgotten his promise ; this incident threw a cooling influence over the too fiery temperament of the *banquero*. It now occurred to him that the wild young fellow might have thought it a remarkable good joke to have returned to Madrid, and leave him to settle affairs as he might.

No sooner did this terrible idea cross his mind than he felt as it were a chilness pervading his whole frame ; he inquired eagerly after Verdeflor, and was answered that no such person had made his appearance at the inn. This information, as it might be expected, cost the *banquero* a new and prolonged fit of staring, but he soon found that this was no remedy, and flushed with anger and indignation, he sallied out to see if Verdeflor were still by any chance at Aranjuez. Don Marcos was in a tremendous flurry ; he bestowed some very hearty curses on his travelling companion, and thought some highly ludicrous things on the difficulty of attaining the post of *Tesorero-general*. Having wandered about the town for the space of an hour without meeting with the object of his solicitude, despairing of success, he was on the point of returning to Madrid, when he perceived Verdeflor tranquilly sitting under a tree in earnest conversation with a man, who, from the number of dogs which surrounded him, appeared a merchant in canine commodities.

No sooner did the agitated *banquero* spy the provoking young fellow than he uttered a loud cry of joy, and ran with all his might towards him, as if afraid to let him escape. Startled by the noise, no less than by the extraordinary deportment of Don Marcos, Verdeflor sprung on his feet, and with some anxiety demanded—

“ What’s the matter, Don Marcos ? who pursues you ? ”

Instead of answering the question, Don Marcos contented himself with wiping his forehead, and protruding his eloquent tongue about a span out of its capacious tenement. This Verdeflor took to be an intimation that he was tired, and accordingly very politely said—

"Sit down, Don Marcos, and rest yourself;" then, without any more ado, he continued his conversation with the dog-dealer, for it appeared that he was bargaining for one of the animals.

"I am glad I have found you, Verdeflor," said Don Marcos, a little more composed; "how could you think of breaking your word in this manner?"

"How, breaking my word!"

"You were to meet me at the inn; but never mind, since I have found you I am content, spite of the anxiety you have made me endure."

"I beg your pardon, Don Marcos; upon my honour, I had quite forgotten the inn—you say you are glad to meet me?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"And I am exceedingly glad to meet you—really you could not have arrived at a more seasonable time. Look at that dog—now examine it minutely."

"Well!" said the astonished Don Marcos.

"Is it not a beautiful animal?"

"I am no judge of dogs."

"So much the worse; I am a good judge, Don Marcos."

"I compliment you on such an attainment."

"Very well, and now you must do something else."

"What must I do?" inquired Cabezon, more puzzled.

"Why, you must pay for the dog."

"Hey? pay for it! I don't want to buy it."

"But I do, and having forgotten my purse I must recar to you in order to disburse the price. So you see, now, I was right when I told you that you had arrived at a very seasonable time. Indeed it was very lucky that you had the goodness to run, for the dog-dealer was going away; and being a shabby dog himself, objected to trust me. Now, Don Marcos, pay the rascal, and let him go about his business!"

"Good Heaven! what do you want with that dog? you have one already, and surely that is enough for any man?"

"We differ in opinion; this is a remarkably fine one, and I must have him—so that is settled."

"Well, have your own way," returned Don Marcos, with one of his most expressive shrugs of the shoulders. He then paid the money required for the dog, as he considered it expedient to comply with all the whims of his young friend, lest by adopting a different line of conduct, he should deprive the poor orphan of her hopeful husband. This done, the dog-dealer departed, and the *banquero*, glad to be left alone, set about communicating his agreeable intelligence to Verdeflor.

"Well, my young friend, every thing is settled now."

"Thank you, Don Marcos; but I shall not offend your delicacy by ever offering to return the money."

"Never mind the money, I am not speaking of that."

"So much the better, Don Marcos—believe me, it is the way to preserve your friends—nothing so ungenerous, mean, and vulgar, as to be putting a man in mind of his debts. Now I know you have no inclination to be esteemed ungenerous, mean, and vulgar."

"Certainly not, and now let us think of something more to the purpose—the bargain is struck."

"I know it, what's the use of repeating it?"

"Good Heavens!—you do? who could inform you?"

"A most beautiful dog," said Verdeflor, not heeding him.

"Now, now, my friend, let me call your attention to—"

"It shall be called Venus, the name suits it properly. I wonder if it'll make friends with Cæsar—come here, Cæsar, you sneaking fool."

"The fellow is mad," said Don Marcos. "Verdeflor," he added, elevating his voice, in angry mood, "will you listen?"

"I am all attention," and he continued playing with the dogs.

"I have seen your goddess, your charmer—she is beautiful, I must confess."

"I am happy to hear it—fine eyes, hasn't she?"

"Oh! such a mouth! then her temper is so good."

"We shall see that presently, though I suspect you are right."

"I am—her shape is divine, she looks like—like—"

"A sylph, I suppose you mean?"

"And if you treat her well she will be very fond of you."

"Don't fear, I shall be exceedingly kind to her!"

"I rejoice to hear it—she really deserves your regard, her actions are numberless—what fine teeth she has!"

"And good legs, hey?"

"Then the complexion," returned Don Marcos.

"And, to sum up all, such a pair of ears, and such a beautiful long tail."

"Beautiful long tail!" exclaimed Don Marcos, springing backwards in stupefied amazement. "Who, in the name of Satan, do you mean?"

"Who do I mean? why, the bitch to be sure. But wherefore this surprise, *banquero*? are you beside yourself?"

"No, but I am positive *you* are. God bless me! here is a fine fellow to be thinking of a dog, when I am speaking to him about his wife that is to be!"

"A strange *quid pro quo!*!" exclaimed Verdeflor, with an immoderate fit of laughter.

Don Marcos did not follow his example; he was so astonished that he judged a solemn look would be more befitting the occasion, and accordingly soon dressed his countenance in a tolerably *sullen* style of gravity. He next considered whether or not he should feel offended at what he thought light and ridiculous conduct in Verdeflor; but upon second reflection he dismissed such an idea, which, though it accorded well with the temper of the *banquero*, might in the sequel prove prejudicial to the *Tesorero-general*. Now Don Marcos felt ~~mis~~ decided respect and affection for the latter personage, that for his sake he was continually obliging the former one to endure a thousand disagreeable things.

Verdeflor having indulged himself in a good hearty side-shaking laugh, for the space of five minutes, at length got tired, and for the first time perceived that the solemnity exhibited by the *banquero* was strangely at variance with the fitness of the occasion. This produced a second explosion of laughter, for when the risible muscles are once relaxed, nothing tends so efficiently to set them again in motion as a serious face, especially such a serious face as Don Marcos was likely to put on. The second laugh being satisfactorily disposed of, Verdeflor resumed the conversation by saying to the grave gentleman—

"Why, Don Marcos, you don't laugh!"

This certainly was no news to Don Marcos, and Verdeflor

might have spared himself the waste of words. So might we, some people will think. But we must observe that the character of historian requires that we should be particular in setting down every minute circumstance, any way connected with matters of importance, and surely we cannot but consider the *banquero's* seriousness as remarkably so.

"No, señor," said Don Marcos, very sedately and very gravely, "I feel no inclination to laugh. Certainly I was bound to expect very different behaviour from you when I was speaking on a subject of so much interest; your gayety, allow me to tell you, was completely misplaced."

"'Pon my word, Don Marcos, you speak very sensibly, and it is decidedly wrong in a young man to make mistakes. However, as you were a partner in the concern, I think it is but just you should share the profits or losses, therefore a moiety of your ill-humour and reproofs are in strict rigour your due, and most assuredly I will not defraud you of your own."

Don Marcos by this time found he had acted foolishly in putting a serious face on the matter, and he really felt hurt that he should have been at the expense of so much gravity, and see so little value set upon it. He resolved on adopting an opposite course; but as he was a decided enemy to all violent transitions, instead of beginning with a downright laugh—which, after his antecedent mood, would go nigh to argue him *non compes*—he deliberately commenced a placid and temperate smile; and when he was about midway in his task, he called his shoulders to his aid, and having performed an excellent shrug—

"Well," he said, "there is no use—you will always be a madcap, I see. But now, can you be serious for a moment?"

"Certainly I can. Speak on, Don Marcos."

"Well, your wife agrees to have you."

"Indeed! vastly kind of her. I suppose she takes me out of repute."

"I have pleaded your cause with that zeal which—"

"We always use when speaking for ourselves," interrupted Verdeflor. "I must now go and pay my respects, I imagine—come along."

"No, my friend, I must return to Madrid without delay, not to alarm the suspicions—"

"Of whom?" inspired his young companion.

"I mean, not to cause any anxiety to my family. No one knows that I am here—I have spoken of you to my sister, Doña Tecla; you have only to present yourself in my name, and will meet with a suitable reception. Only I pray you to be careful how you behave in her presence—she is very religiously inclined, and may easily be shocked by—"

"Oh, fear not, *banquero*, I will not shock the pious lady."

"I hope not, and now farewell—pay your visit as soon as you please, and let me hear your success immediately."

After exchanging a few other remarks, they separated. Don Marcos returned in high spirits to Madrid, and Verdeflor directed his steps to the *beata's* dwelling. By a shorter cut, however, we beg the reader to accompany us to the same place, that by arriving there before him, we may witness what was at that important moment going forward.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was near five in the afternoon, and the *beata's* friends were already assembled to the regular treat of chocolate, and the enlivening accompaniment of gossip. Theresa was closeted in her room, for, after the distressing scene she had been compelled to undergo, her mind was in no state to appear before company. Doña Tecla had lost no time in communicating to her good friends the change which was about to take place in the orphan's future destination; and her good friends had been equally expeditious in testifying their sensations of surprise, discontent, and disappointment.

"*Virgen de Atocha*," quoth Doña Feliciana, rolling her eyes in devout bewilderment; "what say you, Doña Tecla? So after all our friendly admonitions—after so much good counsel, the orphan is to continue exposed to the snares and temptations of the world—well, Padre Sinfiorano, what think you of this?"

Padre Sinfiorano could not answer at that precise moment, the channel of words being intercepted by something more

substantial—but Padre Caledonio, who happened luckily to be disengaged, took upon him to satisfy the *beata*.

"We must say that there is much inconsistency in the conduct of the young woman—she had already chosen the better part, and now—"

"But," interrupted Doña Tecla, submissively, "she is not altogether to blame—I have told you that the superior reasons of my brother have persuaded her to—"

"*Hermana;*" interposed the friar, gravely, "there can be no superior reasons to the instigations of grace, and it is very sinful and wicked in your brother, to divert a soul which was marching in the strait road to salvation, to the crooked and dangerous paths of the world."

This moral remark was received with a general assent of pious looks; and Doña Tecla, with the mild weakness of her disposition, was soon led to believe that her own conduct had not been exempt from blame, in not opposing the intentions of Don Marcos. Many very exemplary things were then bandied about from one member of the devout party to another. At the second cup of chocolate, the fervour of Padre Sinfiorano became conspicuous: he was exceedingly eloquent on the subject of weak women and worldly men—his remonstrances were highly relished by his auditors, especially as the orator suited so well the action to the word, that he forgot not to fix a very expressive look on Doña Tecla, when the words "weak women" were being pronounced.

No worldly men being present, the company lost the benefit of another very expressive look; but in the absence of this finger-post, every one felt pretty capable of finding his own way to the subject of reproof. The *banquero*, therefore, though in strict *incognito*, underwent a very smart lecture, which, if unheard by him, could not but be pretty well understood by his sister. The change indeed in the orphan's prospects called into action all the solicitude of the charitable conclave. Doña Feliciana, and the rest of the *beatas*, were particularly distinguished on the occasion. It is really worthy of the highest praise, to see the interest which old ugly women take in the welfare of young handsome girls. Good souls! they are constantly on the alert, and ready with uncommon zeal to point out the dangers which hourly threaten their fatally charming companions; and indeed much credit must be given them for their solicitude, as there is no doubt they would very willingly remove those fatal

charms from their possessors, in order to free them from the dangers to which they are exposed. Yet such is the perverse disposition of mankind in general, that when they perceive any of these zealous, tender, meritorious matrons prosing away for the good of young girls, they are apt to bestow upon each of them the uncourteous title of "evious old maid;" "spitesful old tabby;" "peevish old duenna;" and such like unseemly appellations. This is certainly a crying injustice, but like other crying sins, we fear it will remain unredressed to the end of the world.

While so much pious breath was in process of being spent, and in the middle of a most edifying sermon of Padre Sinfioriano, the chocolate-drinking congregation had their attention withdrawn from their devout exercises by an unusual bustle at the door of the dwelling. Of course every one, especially the female portion of the assembly, set expeditiously about wondering, thinking, and guessing what it could be. But they were soon relieved from this tantalizing task—the door opened, and in bounced a young man commanding an army of dogs. The party was much surprised and alarmed at this invasion. First the leader called for their unqualified disapprobation. He was carefully dressed in the livery of Satan, and from his whole manner it was clear that he was in the habit of serving his sable majesty in a more substantial way than by merely wearing his livery. This young reprobate was no other than Verdeflor; and with regard to his canine attendants, two of them, Caesar and Venus, belonged to him—the rest, three or four in number, were independent gentlemen, who had accompanied him to the *beata's* dwelling of their own accord, and without any invitation on his part. What possible inducement could have swayed them to this act of courtesy to a stranger, has not yet been ascertained.

Verdeflor and his companions were received any way but kindly, at least so far as it could be judged by external appearance. But neither Verdeflor nor his followers were very difficult to please; and the want of cordiality in their welcome passed therefore totally unregarded. Without further ceremony, Verdeflor addressed himself to Doña Petrona, who happened to be nearer the door—

"Are you Doña Tecla Orbezon?" he inquired.

"No, señor," very sedately and primly answered the *beata*.

"Are you Doña Tecla Cabezon?" he then demanded of Doña Nicolasa, with perfect coolness.

"No, señor," responded the second *beata*, with a look of killing austerity.

"Where the devil then is Doña Tecla Cabezon?" exclaimed Verdeflor, looking round.

Now this third interrogation, mixed with exclamation, produced a prodigious effect. In the first place awful groans were heard, and dismally reprobating looks were seen, but the artillery of words were not yet prepared—the whole party was very sensibly affected by Verdeflor's unchristian invocation—seldom had the nerves of the sanctimonious ladies been so roughly shaken as they were when they heard the name of a sister *beata* coupled with that of the enemy of mankind.

Smelling-bottles are not much in fashion among Spanish ladies, otherwise a very picturesque and striking scene would have followed. Falling into fits, another very effective way of expressing strong feminine emotion, was also omitted, either because the *beatas* had not acquired a competent knowledge of the art, or because they had no fit ready at hand. But in the absence of smelling-bottles and fits, the astonished and powerfully-affected dames had immediate recourse to their rosaries, of which they made a very respectable display.

Padre Sinfiorano expressed his indignation by a growl, and Padre Caledonio undertook to stare the profane intruder out of countenance. But this was no easy matter; for though Padre Caledonio stared capitally, and his look was awfully pertinacious, yet Verdeflor was quite a match for any religious starer in the world. The friar's countenance, indeed, was far superior to that of his young adversary in length, breadth, and thickness, but such advantages did not awe his adversary. Verdeflor, in fact, evinced uncommon resolution in the contest. Father Caledonio felt rather discomposed at such symptoms of courageous resistance, and he accordingly called to his aid an additional stock of ammunition to carry on the war. He contracted his brows, and protruded his lips, and then he looked really tremendous. Verdeflor, however, was not daunted by the appearance of fresh reinforcements. He perceived that he had to cope with a powerful enemy, but felt resolved to dispute the matter to the end.

Accordingly, without loss of time, he brought into the field a most imperturbable smile—and it was now that the battle became truly interesting ; the forces were extremely well matched, and it would have been difficult at that moment to foretell the issue. Some would have betted on the friar's frowns, others for Verdeflor's smile. Full three minutes the combatants continued valiantly to frown and smile, without either losing ground. Neither evinced symptoms of lassitude or drooping spirits. The spectators hung in breathless suspense, when, with no little dismay, the padre's friends perceived that his face was becoming uncommonly red and angry, from the heat of the battle, which being observed by Verdeflor, he strained every point to keep himself cool. He now had great hopes of victory. In a few seconds he beheld his adversary perspiring—and he also fancied that he saw the frown relaxing. Upon this he brought a fresh supply to support his smile. Father Caledonio made a desperate effort to regain his lost ground, by a fearful compression of the lips ; but Verdeflor dexterously parried the attack, by quickly producing a sardonic grin, to occupy the place of his smile. The friar's agitation became more conspicuous ; he perceived that all his endeavours were fruitless, and with a raging heart and flaming face he was inwardly compelled to confess himself vanquished. This confession was made by a heavy breathing of mouth and nostrils, which produced the effect of mixed puffing and snorting.

He next withdrew his eyes from Verdeflor, in token of submission, while Verdeflor gallantly stared a second longer, to see if he would feel disposed to renew the contest. But Padre Caledonio, though mortified in the extreme, had no inclination to commence hostilities again. The battle being thus ended, the friar applied to recover himself from its effects—he wiped the perspiration from his shining forehead, while Doña Feliciana poured out another cup of chocolate to recruit his exhausted spirits. Meantime Doña Tecla, who had not dared to breathe while the contest was disputed, now, in rather mortified tone, exclaimed—

"Well, señorito, what is your business with Doña Tecla Gámez?"

"Nothing with you, upon my word," he replied, with provoking gaiety.

"Then, sir, I am surprised that you have ventured upon."

this intrusion. Such things may do very well, and pass off at Madrid amid a crowd of thoughtless profane coxcombs, but in my house—”

Here she was interrupted by the arrival of auxiliary forces from Doña Feliciana, Doña Petrona, and the rest of the *beatas*. It was now that Verdeflor became alarmed in his turn, and he foresaw that he was likely to sustain a second and far more terrible contest. He was not so far elated by victory as not to shrink with apparent dismay from the threatening combat—Alas! he knew that though he had come off victorious from a friar's frown, he would never be able to compete successfully with six female tongues. He accordingly very prudently declined the battle, and to the declaration of war proclaimed by Doña Tecla he answered in terms so submissive and pacific as to call at least for a truce, if not to entirely remove the threatening danger.

He now, in polite words, expressed the object of his visit, but the enunciation, instead of calming the hostile propensities of the whole party, produced visible signs of increased disquietude. Verdeflor's explanation was met with another volley of groans and ominous looks; he was puzzled and vexed, the more so as he did not see his intended audience.

“Doña Tecla Cabezon,” he then said, “I was told by your brother that I should here meet my intended wife, who is, as he assured me, a young and beautiful woman. Now as I see here no woman to answer exactly his description, I should be obliged by some explanation.”

Now, it was exceedingly impolite in Verdeflor to put the pious coterie in mind that they were neither young nor handsome. This new offence, therefore, tended to heighten the very unfavourable impression which his first appearance had already made. Doña Tecla put on a very prim, severish, maidish look, and said.

“Your intended wife, señor, as you call the young orphan, is not at present to be seen. She is indisposed, and the sight of her future lord will not, I apprehend, contribute much to her recovery.”

“Thank you, Doña Tecla,” replied Verdeflor, coolly. “I'll do myself the honour of calling again to-morrow. But I would entreat you not to be so extremely diffident concerning the efficacy of a young husband such as I, in removing any causes of complaint, and becoming agreeable to an orphan bride.”

This last speech did not conciliate either the male or female part of that select committee, but another incident occurred, totally to exhaust the little stock of patience which still remained among them. It was the following: Verdeflor's canine companions had thought proper to imitate their leader's unceremonious entrance, and had accordingly begun to stroll and snuffle, and establish themselves in the house with perfect freedom. This was very provoking to Doña Tecla's favourite lapdog; nor did the two cats regard the intruders with a more friendly eye. A few morose looks from the dog, with as many preliminary growls, indicated that he was inclined to resent the strangers' rudeness, and that he watched for an occasion more unequivocally to testify his displeasure and indignation. This soon occurred: Venus in sportive mood approached the favourite, and she was followed by the other independent dogs. The favourite returned their friendly advances with a determined growl of scorn and enmity; he had even the temerity, considering himself in his own house, to dart furiously against Cæsar, an offence which Cæsar, in consideration of the name he bore, could not tamely brook. A scene of confusion ensued, in which the poor favourite was miserably mauled by the namesake of the Roman conqueror. Verdeflor enjoyed the sport, which being observed by Cæsar and his companions, served to encourage them. In default of other dogs the two cats were assaulted; this terrible battle was to poor Doña Tecla a source of deeper anxiety than even the foregoing one between the frown and the smile. She made a prodigious clatter, and hastened to extricate her favourite from the paws of his enemies.

The whole of the party were horribly shocked at these proceedings, the more so when they beheld the mirthful disposition with which they were contemplated by Verdeflor; the noise and uproar became astounding—dogs barking, cats mewing, beasts screaming; friars remonstrating, and Verdeflor laughing. All these effective sounds mixed up together made a most singular concert. When the promiscuous din began a little to abate, Padre Sinfioriano being the best preser of the party, undertook to sermonize the young gentleman.

" You ought to be ashamed of such conduct, sir," he cried, with zealous indignation, " to come and raise this disturbance in a peaceful Christian dwelling."

" I beg your pardon, good father, but the disturbance ori-

ginated wholly with the dogs, and I wash my hands of any disagreeable occurrence."

"The dogs! and who brought the dogs here, sir?"

"Why they brought themselves, to be sure."

"But you, sir, are the owner of these pernicious animals."

"Of two, I am. All the rest very complacently accompanied me here of their own accord. I can assure you I did not invite them, they are quite strangers to me."

"Oh, very well," exclaimed Padre Galedonio, a sturdy, strong, square-built man; "then some of the intruders shall not go away without the reward due to their offence."

Verdeflor perceiving symptoms of war in his previous adversary, and suspecting that he would vent upon the dogs the rage produced by his former failure against him, called Cæsar and Venus to his side, and left the independent gentlemen to fight their own battles. Upon this, Father Galedonio and Father Sinsoriano went expeditiously to work. They fell upon the independent party of dogs without mercy, and having satisfactorily expended all the choleric which they had been accumulating by Verdeflor's conduct upon the poor animals, they were ignominiously packed-out of doors. The two padres having achieved this gloriousfeat, returned very contentedly to their seats. Verdeflor soon after took his departure, leaving, as he supposed, the whole party much refreshed and consoled by the castigation inflicted on the poor brutes.

Here a crowd of philosophical speculations press upon our mind, but we will not be so unmerciful as to thrust them upon the reader. We must, however, observe, that the rage with which the good fathers and beatus were nearly choked, being fortunately removed by that expedient, we should advise our readers, whenever they have a mind to offend and exasperate any one, always to have at hand a comparatively inferior and defenceless subject, on whom the storm which they have succeeded in exciting may vent its fury.

It is a most desirable expedient to both parties and acts as a safety-valve to let out their superfluous heat.

Verdeflor, during his tour of the country, had made a collection of specimens of the animal kingdom, and these he had put up in a large trunk, which he had brought with him from the city of Mexico, and which he had now placed in a room of his house, where he could easily get at it when he wanted it.

He had a small collection of dried plants, and these he had put up in a box, which he had also brought with him from the city of Mexico, and which he had now placed in a room of his house, where he could easily get at it when he wanted it.

CHAPTER IX.

FOLLY AND FEELING.

On the following morning Verdeflor lost no time in repairing to Doña Tecla's residence. The impression which he had made upon his first visit was not likely to make him anticipate a very welcome reception upon his second. But the young gentleman was fortunately blessed with a comfortable portion of that quality which I shall call *inconscience*, for want of a proper term to express it in English. He did not therefore much trouble his head either about Doña Tecla's moroseness or her pious *coterie's* indignation ; but with a light heart, and consummate assurance, he thundered for admittance as loud as any magnificent grandee might be expected to do.

He soon found that the *beata* had not quite slept away the effects of the previous evening's ruffle. A very cold, composed, beatitudinal sedateness was observable in her countenance. She returned his politeness with stiff formality, and did not even deign to offer him a glass of Málaga wine : still the warmth of Verdeflor's constitution was not chilled by this evident coldness, nor was he much affected by the melancholy state in which her favourite lapdog lay looking so pathetically in his mistress's face. Indeed the animal seemed to recognise Verdeflor, who, this time however, had the prudence to come unaccompanied by his canine attendants. After the first and indispensable salutations, Doña Tecla beckoned to Verdeflor to follow—the invitation was as silently obeyed, and in two seconds he found himself in a back apartment, with a view to the garden, where the *beata*, without further ceremony, left him to his meditation.

Verdeflor was then in no mood for reflection, and indeed could seldom be accused of such an unprofitable waste of time ; but now, in the impatience of curiosity to become acquainted with a female reported young and beautiful, his mind could not for a single moment remain quiet enough to proceed

with the operation of thinking. He looked with listless stare about the apartment, and, in order to kill time, minutely inspected the pious prints which decorated the walls.

Every print was well scrutinized, till this resource being exhausted, he next betook himself to the window, and began to look into the garden. But in his opinion the garden was very much like every other garden he had seen—it contained trees, shrubs, and flowers; there was a scarecrow, composed of an old hat stuck upon a pole, a broken spade in one of the walks, and the gardener's coat leisurely thrown on another. The examination of these objects did not afford him any particular delight. He turned again to the prints, when, lo! to his agreeable surprise, he beheld a female at the lower extremity of the room, but how or when she came there, he could not imagine.

She was sitting, and apparently occupied with a book, which she put down upon his entrance. It was natural enough for Verdeflor to suppose that this was his destined bride, and the supposition did not at all displease him. He saw, at the first glance, that the young lady was well deserving the encomiums which Don Marcos had bestowed upon her. Verdeflor stood for a moment in mute suspense, and that moment was employed in analyzing the beauties of the fair *incognita*. She appeared labouring under some affliction; but this did not much trouble her gay destined partner, as he shrewdly thought there might be a thousand reasons for a young woman being melancholy, besides the idea of going to be married. Verdeflor was rather skeptical on the subject of female sorrow. He never gave credit for more than one-half of what he heard, or was exhibited—that half, too, he was always disposed to grudge. He had a notion, a very pernicious notion we confess—that females consider themselves more interesting bathed in tears, than when decked in smiles—that they are always prompt to act tragedy, and that, altogether, no great reliance is to be placed upon their mere ostensible emotion.

This, as we have observed, is a shocking opinion, and we hope the fair sex will pardon us for alluding to it; for really there is nothing we dread so much in this world as giving offence to the ladies. This wicked opinion, remember, is Verdeflor's, and not ours; only we have been induced to set it down in our impartial character of historiographers. *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.* There, we have

assimilated the fair sex to Plato—so we hope that this will smooth their feelings a little towards us.

After his fit of incredulity, Verdeflor considered it expedient to address the young lady. He advanced gently, with a very delicate step, as if afraid of alarming the fair apparition away. He then threw an extremely softly and ladylike glance to call her attention, with as gentle a hem; but these manœuvres were superfluous, for she had already seen him—they served Verdeflor, however, to collect his thoughts.

It was now for the first time in his life that he discovered that he was not quite so bold as he had flattered himself. He felt as if spell-bound, and totally unable to bring into the field even one of his till then obedient and well-regulated compliments. What could this mean? The young man had never before experienced so strange a sensation. The presence of females, young or old, handsome or plain, had never till now damped his presence of mind. Yet such is the power of female loveliness and beauty, when arrayed in sorrow, and evincing that composed dignity of deportment so suitable to the sex, that it instantaneously checks the progress of forwardness, levity, or impertinence. This was precisely the case with Verdeflor. He had expected that he should get over the scene with his usual happy freedom and ready compliments. But he had neither freedom nor compliments at command. It was indispensable, however, for him to say something; and he further knew that it was expected he should, on such an occasion, be the first interlocutor. He therefore very appropriately began with—

"Good morning, señorita."

The señorita bowed in token of acknowledgment, and then followed a very decent pause.

"A beautiful prospect you have here, señorita?"

A gentle nod signified that the young lady concurred in opinion. The situation of Verdeflor was irksome in the extreme, he felt inclined to bestow his malediction on the *banquero* for having brought him into this predicament. On the other hand, the beauty of his intended gave him no small degree of satisfaction, and he flattered himself that he would soon get over the awkwardness of the first minutes of so distressingly interesting an interview.

"Now," said he to himself, "above all things I must be made acquainted with my wife's name—certainly I am going to ask a very singular question in the present advanced state

of affairs, but there is no other way of getting at the desired knowledge."

"Señorita, I beg your pardon ; but may I ask what is your name ?"

"Theresa," answered the orphan, in a gentle tone.

"Theresa ! a very prettily sounding name. Theresa, I like it vastly—my name is Rafael Verdeflor ; it is rather pretty too. And your family, señorita ?"

"Family, alas ! I have none."

"Indeed ! precisely my case—well there is sympathy in all this. I see that Heaven has made us for each other."

Verdeflor had now recovered his wonted ease and assurance, and found no difficulty in proceeding, while the unfortunate orphan struggled to restrain the emotion with which she was overpowered.

"Now, Theresita ; I must be sincere with you. It is not my principle to deceive any young, beautiful female, much less one who is to be my—. So, that it may not take you by surprise, and when there is no remedy, I must candidly tell you that I possess the most unfortunate head in the world. I have, indeed ; it is no flattery."

A mournful smile was the answer to this pleasing intelligence. Verdeflor continued :—

"Yes, I am rather giddy and careless, don't stand much upon ceremony, and like to have my own way prodigiously ;—now, take away these defects, and a few other trifling blemishes, and I think I can promise to make an agreeable sort of a husband, and that it will be my unremitting occupation, as well as serious duty to make myself, if not a passionate lover, an indulgent husband at least. I have no great relish for those violent passions. I was completely cured of them by a certain young lady ; but I suppose you care little for all this, and therefore I shall spare you the information. Oh ! I was sadly jilted, and from that moment I made a vow never to love women except *à la militaire*."

"And yet you think of becoming a husband ?"

"Certainly, and why not ? One has nothing to do with the other. I may be a very sensible, tender, complaisant husband, without feeling a spark of passionate love. Oh ! yes, I'll be the model of husbands—and you, I dare engage, will be the model of wives. Besides you shall be absolute mistress of your own time and actions. I am exceedingly tolerant of course, being a philosopher of the Epicurean class."

But what do I see ! my conversation appears to give you no pleasure—you look pale, and those tears—ah ! what do they mean ? Now, señorita, deal frankly with me—whence this increasing sorrow ?”

“ Wretched ! wretched Theresa !” she exclaimed with bitterness.

“ No, I think I am the most wretched of the two, since I elicit no other sentiments from you but those of sorrow and disgust. For Heaven’s sake ! let us understand each other —answer with candour, señorita ?”

“ I always do.”

“ Well, so much the better—do you like me ?”

“ No, sir.”

“ And do you think you ever shall like me ?”

“ No, sir.”

“ No ! well, that is candid at all events. Theresa, you are very explicit, and I am very frank—so here is sympathy again.”

The orphan gave a deep sigh ; there was another pause. Verdeflor made use of it to recover his self-possession, which had been rather staggered by the intended bride’s blunt assertion.

“ But,” resumed Verdeflor, “ though you neither like me now, nor think that you shall ever feel any tender affection for me, still you are content to become my wife ?”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Oh ! ah, that’s positive.”

Verdeflor fixed his eyes on the orphan, in something like astonishment. Theresa observing his emotion, in a calm, sorrowful voice proceeded :—

“ Yes, sir, I shall become your wife, and from that moment my existence shall be devoted to fulfil the duties of my station. More you cannot expect, nor I hope will you oblige me to speak on a subject that—”

“ But, señorita, I want to know something else, so I entreat you to speak on that point, however disagreeable it may be. We must be even in frankness ; I have told you who, and what I am—I expect the same favour from you. Upon my word, it is a singular adventure altogether, and I really don’t know what to make of it.”

“ Alas ! sir,” replied Theresa, in a sad voice, my melancholy tale can have but little interest for you. I am a helpless orphan, dependent on the bounty of the family of Ca-

besides, I have been imprudent—I am, I was I mean, engaged—but—but—shall make a virtuous wife."

" So, so, now I begin to see my wife—an orphan ! virtuous and unhappy wife ! hem ! that is to be translated thus : being helpless and dependent, they are going to marry you against your inclination—thus the case stands—eh, señorita ?"

" You shall never have reason to complain of your wife. She knows her duties, the rights of a husband, and will be scrupulous in discharging them."

" Very sensibly said, no doubt, but that is no answer to my question. Now, I pray you, señorita, in the name of all that is sacred, and as you value your happiness and mine, be open and sincere with me."

Verdeflor uttered these words with a fervour of tone, and an earnestness of manner, which seemed strangely at variance with the gay recklessness of his habitual conduct. Theresa cast a look of surprise upon him, but spoke not.

" Theresa," he continued, " trust to my delicacy and honour ; I will not claim advantages which must be purchased at the expense of your happiness and peace of mind. You must unfold the whole circumstance of this strange adventure, for I can assure you of my total ignorance. Wholly unacquainted with you—indeed, perfectly unaware that such a lovely mourner existed in the world, I have been invited to become your husband, and by so doing to obtain very advantageous offers with regard to my pecuniary interests—no small temptations for a man, who, like me, has not got a single dollar. This marriage would have extricated me from all difficulties ; but I should never pardon myself, if I were to enjoy these advantages at the expense of the suffering of a fair, helpless victim."

" What say you ?" inquired Theresa, affected at his generosity.

" Nothing but the truth. I have already told you that I am very sincere. I have a sad head, good for nothing, certainly. I am capable of committing a thousand absurdities. I am guilty of many errors, and I am apt to commit many more, but so mean an action as the one that is now expected from me, never—no never ! I shall therefore renounce the projected union, and return to my old life, poor, but gay, without a single dollar, but full of spirit and merriment."

"Oh, no," said Theresa, "rather let us make this sacrifice for the good of Carlos and his father."

"Carlos! his father!" exclaimed Verdeflor, in amazement. "Carlos!—now a light breaks in upon me. Good Heavens! what a dull owl have I been not to have seen it before. Well, well, there is no mischief done. Pray, señorita, are you not a certain lady with whom Carlos, as I have heard, was secretly in love?"

"Alas! I am, indeed, that unfortunate."

"There! all this disagreeable work might have been prevented had Carlos reposed more confidence in his friend. But that is one of his failings—he is close—close like a pina.* It is too bad really in Carlos to be so reserved to his best friend. Well, I forgive him—and now Theresita, rest assured that we shall be able to counteract the fine machinations of the old papa. Yes, rest assured that I will never lend myself to the furtherance of your persecutor's plans—honour, delicacy forbade it before I knew the secret of his love, without acquaintance with the object; and now friendship comes to add its voice to such sacred calls. Poor Carlos! he has always been so kind to me—so very kind—he never refused to lend me money—and upon my word, lending money continually is a severe test of friendship—he is a true friend, and a grateful return was I, like a fool and idiot, on the point of making to his favours, by depriving him of the treasure he most values in life. Now I shall immediately set about—"

"Stay, sir, be not precipitate—the future happiness of your friend requires that I should make this sacrifice."

"Bah! I know better—besides my own principles and feelings, for I have principle and feeling sometimes, forbid me to receive the richest recompense steeped in suffering woman's tears. I am not romantic, certainly, nor very scrupulous in general, but this being a piece of meanness and rascality, I may say, I would rather be excused from proceeding in the business—and now you may command my services, and though I cannot be accepted as a lover, I may be of use, perhaps, as a confidant; and indeed, from all I see, you are in sad want of true sympathizing friends. Heaven defend us! here you are shut up and surrounded with abominable dragons in the unprepossessing shapes of

* Pineapple.

friars and *beatas*. A goodly situation for a young helpless female—I wonder you are not dead before this—why those she-dragons, and those clerical monsters are enough—I don't wish to shock you—no—but really it puzzles me how you have been able to withstand the miseries of your situation."

"They have all been very kind to me," gently returned Theresa.

"Well, well, there must be diversity of opinion, that is the case now; but we must turn our thoughts to something more important. I shall set off immediately for Madrid, and the unconscionable *banquero* shall hear a piece of my mind."

"Oh, sir, for Heaven's sake be not rash; in endeavouring to serve me, your generous pity may lead you to involve us in deeper misery."

"Fear not, I can act cautiously when it suits me—that certainly does not happen very often; but in this instance I shall deserve the appellation of a prudent man. Besides, what should you apprehend? no one can compel you, because you are an orphan, to marry against your inclination. Fine things, 'pon my word, should we see in the world, if pretty orphans were only to be thus married. No more tears, my dear lovely friend! you'll allow me to call you dear friend, eh?—to be sure you will—the fact is, that I love you more now than when I considered you as my wife. I am very frank, eh? for you know that you said you could never fancy me—that's my way; so I am off to Madrid—now pray be composed and fear nothing. I shall soon see Carlos, and—but it is of no use troubling you any longer with my presence. Good morning, my sweet friend. God bless your eyes!—never saw such a lovely face in all my life. Bewitching eyes, 'pon my word—well, Carlos is a lucky dog to be loved by an angel! Excuse me, 'tis my way—adieu! I will settle that sly old provident papa."

CHAPTER X.

NOBLE RESOLUTIONS.

WITH these last words, Verdeflor made a hasty unceremonious bow, and began to make his way at a brisk pace out of the house. Doña Tecla came accidentally in his way, but he deigned to take no further notice of her than if she were a part of the household furniture. This was not polite, certainly, but Verdeflor was in such a ferment, that his greatest friend might at that time have passed unnoticed. The rapidity of his movement surprised the good *beata*, and she forthwith sought information from Theresa. But the orphan was quite as much amazed as the old lady. After the first emotion, however, she related with great candour what had passed in the foregoing interview, and reiterated her determination to retire into a convent. Doña Tecla was not displeased at this change of affairs. She certainly dreaded the first brunt of her brother's displeasure, but that inconvenience once over, every thing she considered would turn out for the better. Theresa would be snatched from every worldly temptation and become a nun. This would afford inexplicable joy and comfort to all the good *padres* and *beatas* who knew her. Besides, she would be rescued from falling into the horrid snare of having so profane and dangerous a husband as the one destined for her. Verdeflor could not, of course, according to the pious committee of Aranjuez, be deemed a proper partner in life for a young woman, educated in the fear of God, and brought up according to the principles of Christianity.

Verdeflor, in short, was a reprobate, according to the unanimous opinion of those worthy people; and indeed he had given them tolerable grounds upon which to build so disadvantageous an estimate. A man must certainly be a sad sinner, who comes to a *beata's* chocolate party, dressed in the foppery of worldly fashion—enters without craving a blessing—brings with him a party of insolent dogs—and stares Padre Caledonio out of countenance. These misdeeds spoke vol-

umes of themselves, and accordingly the whole conclave went charitably to work on this young sinner's reputation, which of course stood in need of immense repair after such a mangling.

To see the orphan rescued from so objectionable a husband, was very consoling to the devout dames. It was also consoling to the orphan herself, as by this means she could keep her faith inviolable to Carlos. But most consoling of all was this incident to Padre Sinforiano and Padre Caledonio, who could now proceed undisturbed in their edifying and moral lectures. Verdeflor was another party who found it consoling that he had not further committed himself, in conspiring against the happiness of an interesting and unprotected female. Thus it appeared that Verdeflor's interview with the orphan was a productive source of general consolation. How Don Marcos Cabezon felt, we shall see presently, though we are afraid of not doing justice to his feelings. We beg our readers not to anticipate too much, or it is a hundred to one they will be disappointed ; for the present, let us follow the gay mercurial Verdeflor to Madrid. He had resolved, immediately upon his arrival, to repair to the *banquero's* mansion, and frankly to avow his determination. He was arrested, however, in his laudable course, by an unexpected meeting with Cortante.

" Hallo ! Verdeflor, my good fellow—whither so fast ?"

" Is it you ?—ah ! how do you do ? Just arrived from Aranjuez, upon a foolish expedition."

" To keep thee in practice," returned Cortante, laughing.

" No, I can assure you, it is no ridiculous affair of my own seeking. Besides, I am going to act a reasonable part this time."

" Indeed ! well, that must be interesting from its singularity. Will you favour me a little with a specimen of your rationality."

" The fact is, I am in a desperate hurry—I long to sing a most dismal song to that empty-pated Don Marcos—but I must tell you—yes—you must know—"

Here we need not repeat what Verdeflor communicated to Cortante, as it was but a circumstantial account of what has already been related. Cortante listened with deep attention, and appeared highly interested in the recital."

" Well, my dear friend," he said at last, " I congratulate you that you have acted nobly, honourably, towards that in-

teresting young girl, though let me tell you that she is not the helpless, destitute creature that you suppose."

"How! what mystery is this—have I been deceived by—"

"By no one, Verdeflor, for neither Don Marcos nor the *beatas* know any more concerning Theresa than you do yourself. More I am not allowed to disclose, so farewell."

"Stop, stop, this is rather unceremonious and ungrateful, after my complaisance in staying to satisfy your curiosity. Upon my honour it is shameful."

Cortante, however, despite his remonstrance, departed, smiling to himself. Verdeflor thought this conduct very strange ; he mused for a moment—his musings were never long protracted—and then he said,

"Well, the secret must come out some time or other. Besides, who knows, perhaps the Marchioness of Montechico may throw some light on the subject. Cortante is assiduous in his visits there—the marchioness, too, has a marvellous stock of scandalous chronicles ; to her I must hasten before I direct my stronger battery against the *banquero*."

Having formed this resolution he delayed not a moment to put it in practice. Verdeflor was passionately fond of expedition in all his affairs, and, indeed, should he ever come to England, I make no doubt he would be a prodigious patron of steam. In the absence of steam conveyances he made his legs serve his purpose most capitally, and in a short time he found himself at the mansion of the Marchioness of Montechico.

Here, perhaps, we ought to apologize for so often mentioning the said marchioness, and never bringing her ladyship into view. Some readers may think she is very long in making her appearance, but the truth of the matter is, that she is not to make her appearance at all. This is one of the new things in this book, expressly meant to raise expectations, and then to disappoint them ; though, by-the-by, some people may be inclined to dispute with us this novelty of the thing, as other authors before me may claim that merit with equal justice. However, to set the matter concerning the marchioness at rest, I promise on the word of a gentleman and a Spaniard, to introduce her ladyship to my readers on some future occasion, provided that, in the mean time, the readers keep me in good humour for the task. Now I think this only fair.

CHAPTER XI.

MATRIMONIAL SCHEMES.

DON MARCOS CABEZON was at this time exceedingly well satisfied with himself. He imagined that he had displayed consummate skill, tact, and activity in all the stages of his proceedings with regard to the orphan. Don Marcos being a grateful and not an irreligious man, it is to be supposed that he was particularly diligent and expressive in returning thanks to that Providence which had made him so clever.

The thing which now most engrossed his heart was to become *Tesorero-general*, that his dear country might have as soon as possible the benefit of his brilliant talents. Love of country was another of the *banquero's* virtues. He now felt very impatient for the return of Verdeflor, whose presence at Madrid he hailed of course as the precursor of so many brilliant prospects.

Carlos, meantime, had not abandoned his fit of sullen melancholy, but the philosophic Don Marcos troubled his head very little about the young gentleman's whims and fancies. The *banquero* was persuaded that his mood would pass away. Theresa once married, her young lover must of necessity yield to his fate, the thing would be past remedy, and conformity to his father's will the only alternative left to the son. Arguing very sapiently upon the mutability of human affairs, the abstruse *banquero* well knew that his son could not for ever remain in his present disagreeable mood and that was sufficient for him. Besides, as he was consulting the welfare of his son, his conscience felt tranquil; he was only acting as behooveth a tender and solicitous parent. If the son failed to set a proper value on his fatherly anxiety, that ought to be no impediment to his fulfilling what he considered a duty.

Don Marcos was now anxiously awaiting the return of his youthful ally, not, indeed, without feeling some qualms, arising from his knowledge of Verdeflor's whimsical disposition and character. But the *banquero* very prudently set at

rest any doubts that might rise on this head ; like a sensible man, he was always well disposed to look at the fair side of the picture. Of course, Verdeflor could not help loving the orphan ; he must love the orphan—why should he not love the orphan ? It would, indeed, be peculiarly hard that he, who was always so well disposed to fall in love with every pretty face that came in his way, should take it into his head not to do the same with the orphan's pretty face, just on purpose to mortify Don Marcos Cabezon. Then with the young fellow's amatory propensities, how was it possible he could resist the charms of Theresa, combined as they were with the other attractions which were to be forthcoming in a pecuniary form.

All these speculations, and many more which we very charitably spare the reader, had kept crossing the *banquero's* mind since the moment he returned from Aranjuez. But Verdeflor did not make his appearance at the time it had been agreed upon ; this was exceedingly tantalizing ; the day passed very tediously, though he took every means to beguile the time. He called on the Countess of Belprado, and acquainted her with the minutest particular concerning his diplomatic expedition. The lady expressed herself perfectly satisfied with the *banquero's* skill and prudence in the business ; and as, in the opinion of both, every obstacle was now surmounted, it only remained to settle the day for the wedding. On this point it was no difficult matter to agree ; the countess was quite as eager to possess the *banquero's* wealth, as the *banquero* appeared mad after the post of *Tesorero-general*, and becoming father-in-law to a young countess.

This congeniality of disposition rendered every thing easy, and they mutually pledged their words to hold their respective children ready for the sacrifice on the appointed day. It now only remained to appoint that day.

"Why, my dear countess," said Don Marcos, "I think that as soon as Verdeflor becomes a husband, we should not lose a moment to...."

"Certainly ; but have you settled with him the day—the hour ?"

"Really, my dear countess, I beg your pardon ; but as I am a sinner, that circumstance quite slipped my memory. Nevertheless, I feel easy on that score, for if Verdeflor is not married by the time he comes back, I pledge my word he

shall pack off immediately to fulfil the ceremony. We may therefore conclude, that the day after to-morrow, my Carlos and Paulita may enter the holy state."

"That's decided, Don Marcos—you are sure that your son—"

"Bless me, *Condesa*," interrupted the *banquero*, "I have told you a thousand times to make yourself easy on this subject. I know my cue well enough, and I am not a man to make promises which I am not convinced will be fulfilled."

"I trust to your judgment, and with this conviction I shall immediately acquaint Paulita with our resolution, and bid her be ready for the ceremony."

The *banquero's* face was overspread with a beam of uncontrollable joy—the rotundity of his cheeks seemed to have acquired an elastic power of increasing with the swelling of satisfaction. After a minute's pause—

"My dear *Condesa*," he resumed, in a soft tone, "I owe you much, very much, and I shall never lose sight of the weight of my obligations to you. I am rich, very rich, and according to our previous agreement, I am to lay down on the day of the nuptials—"

"Oh! don't mention it, *banquero*," said the countess, smiling.

"I know," rejoined Don Marcos, "that you are not an interested mother, like many other mothers, and that circumstance binds me the more closely to you, for I hate mercenary mothers as I hate the enemy of mankind—a prudent mother I esteem and respect, but a mercenary one excites my disgust and contempt."

"You are vastly polite, Don Marcos," returned the prudent, disinterested mother, "and I coincide with you. Ambitious, scheming fathers are my aversion, but I always felt a sentiment of regard and respect for a spirited parent who nobly aspires to push his way in the world."

"You are a most kind and noble lady to say so," replied the spirited parent, "and I really feel the greatest pleasure to do business with you. I beg your pardon—I mean to transact—to arrange—to—you understand me, madam?"

"Perfectly," answered the countess, smiling, "though you ought, *banquero*, to be always careful to clothe your meaning with select and inoffensive words. I can assure you that people are far more often offended by words than by deeds."

" You are right, *Condesa*; the word business was very misplaced, but, coming to the point, I am to lay down—"

" A hundred thousand dollars," returned the countess, " on the day of the wedding—besides the whole of your fortune in cash, bonds, claims, landed property, &c. &c. to Don Carlos, your son; and in case of a separation (which Heaven forbid), my daughter shall have just claim to a half of the whole. Twenty thousand dollars, moreover, you must settle on Paulita as a dowry, and twenty thousand more must come to my possession to answer the—"

" I understand," interrupted Don Marcos. " Well, countess, you are very perfect in the articles of the agreement, as far as concerns your side of the question—now, if you please, let us look a little to mine. Upon the marriage of our children, I am to have the post of *Tesorero-general*, which you are to procure for me. Item, you must exert yourself to procure likewise the Order of Charles the Third, as soon as I have served my country in the above-mentioned capacity a couple of years. You must also, on every occasion, afford me your countenance to establish me firmly in the circles of the grand world; and upon the event of my death (which Heaven defer as long as possible!), a portion of my wealth is to purchase for my son the title of Marquis of Puebla Cabezon, so that his heir may add it to that of Count de Belprado."

" Well, *banquero*," observed the countess, smiling, " I see that your memory is quite as correct as mine; our mutual understanding is now perfectly clear."

" By my hopes of future preferment," said the overjoyed Don Marcos, " there's nothing in the world like proper understanding in doing business. I beg your pardon, countess, for this obnoxious word in transacting negotiations, or negotiating transactions, I should have said."

This matrimonial barter or sale of domestic affection being thus concluded, both the parties separated, very well satisfied with each other. The inflated Don Marcos sped to his house in one of his most brisk trot, in breathless eagerness to persuade, or rather to compel his son to give his assent for the celebration of the nuptials in one or two days. The more than usual fidgets conspicuous in the conduct of the *banquero* had made Carlos already suspect that some very important and dexterous *coup de main* was in preparation. When he was summoned, therefore, into his father's

presence, he also thought it expedient to look for some resources, in order to meet the paternal attack with a suitable defence.

The *banquero's* looks, as his son entered the apartment, were ominous of most important things. He was walking very leisurely and solemnly along, his hands crossed behind, under the skirts of his coat, his fat body slightly bent forward, and his face stupified with an extraordinary stock of gravity, solemnity, and importance.

He seemed so absorbed in thought that his son's presence was at first unnoticed. This want of perception in Don Marcos was in strict keeping with the occasion; for men of profound minds, when deeply engaged in mental occupation, ought always to evince inattention to external objects. It is really astonishing what a degree of authority this temporary want of sight is apt to confer on those individuals who can exhibit more solidity of thought in their faces than in their words.

When Don Marcos conceived that he had remained a competent time without seeing his son, though he stood before his eyes, he stopped short with a jerk, indicating that his musing mood was now ended, and in a soft tone of fatherly condescension said,

"Ah, Carlos, there you are! Sit down, and listen with attention."

This was an awful opening, and Carlos, who had been taught, by sad experience, to dread his kind parent's powers of prosing, felt duly alarmed for the forthcoming visitation. He was however a well-behaved child, so long as his inclinations were not violently thwarted, and he resolved to preserve a very deferential attitude, as long as he possibly could without detriment to those dear inclinations.

"My good Carlos," then resumed the *banquero*, in a very sedate tone of voice, as if he were measuring the weight of each word he was about to utter, "I have on different occasions spoken to you on the subject of your wedding with the young Countess de Belprado."

Carlos heaved a sigh in assent to the correctness of his father's assertion. That sigh however escaped the notice of the *banquero*, who was fortunately blessed with a deficiency of hearing as well as of sight, on certain particular occasions. He took two strides nearer his son, and drew forth one of his substitutes for hands, with a view of making some

eloquent gesticulation : for an orator is worth very little unless he knows how to saw the air.

" I have been reflecting," he then said, " that for the mutual advantage of both parties, it is necessary that the said marriage should be celebrated immediately. I am confident that your good sense will prompt you to coincide with my views, and that you will offer no objection to the fulfilment of the ceremony on the day after to-morrow."

The *banquero's* confidence on the state of his son's good sense was no doubt premature, for Carlos gave a sudden but nowise agreeable start, at the bare announcement of the approaching honours of Hymen. Don Marcos, among his other eminent qualifications, was endowed with a thorough knowledge of the nature of starts, and immediately perceived that the one afforded in this instance by his son was anything but favourable to his designs. With exemplary courage, however, he resolved not to let himself be beaten out of the field by a simple start. This incipient resistance led him only to bring greater powers into action, and he began to exhibit decided symptoms of his hostile intentions, in case of a rebellion on the part of his undutiful boy. He knit his eyebrows, and compressed his chin against his breast, then he shook his head and sent forth a puff of wind, as if to ease his labouring bosom.

" Carlos, Carlos, this will never do. I see that instead of evincing readiness to meet my proposal, you are about to exhibit a tacit disinclination in your looks. I was certainly not bound to expect this, after the many hopes you have given me of having been persuaded to—"

" Hopes, sir !" exclaimed Carlos, in surprise ; " with all due deference to you, I beg to observe that I am not conscious of having given you any hopes at all."

" Here is a precious dog !" cried the father, waxing wrathful. " So you have never given me any hopes at all ! How dare you say so, after all that has happened ? Have you not visited your intended bride several times, and have you not been remarkably attentive and polite to her, so as to make her believe that you really entertain an affection for her ? Has not the countess, her mother, invited you repeatedly to her elegant *tertulias* ? and finally, have I not gone to the enormous expense of giving a grand entertainment to the nobility and gentry of Madrid, and a splendid

thing it was too ; after this, how dare you assert that you have given me no hopes at all ! ”

This method of reasoning in the father caused no small surprise in the son ; but happily he was so accustomed to see many extraordinary things in his worthy sire, that he soon got over his wondering fit.

“ Sir, I am sorry,” he then said, “ that excessive submission, or rather want of proper decision on my part, should have led you to form any delusive expectations ; but I should never forgive myself if I let the present opportunity pass without pronouncing my decided and irrevocable opposition to the honour which you, in your kindness, no doubt, had in view for me.”

This was certainly a fit occasion to pronounce an oath, and the Don Marcos Cabezon did not omit it. On the contrary, he favoured his son with a profusion of oaths and other wicked exclamations that quite astonished him. But the son stood the attack with amazing coolness and intrepidity. Perceiving that this terrible fire produced no effect, Don Marcos determined upon a different system of warfare.

“ Well, young master,” he said, with affected calmness ; “ if you think that you can make a plaything of your indulgent father you are much mistaken. Kindness and forbearance have their limits, and henceforth you shall see me assume the rights and authority of a parent. I shall therefore say no more, but merely allow you four-and-twenty hours to choose between Paulita and affluence, or my curse and beggary.”

Don Marcos delivered himself of this tremendous sentence with peculiar effect, but it produced no other on the mind of his son except that of confirming him more strongly in his previous resolution. The *banquero* now began to walk about the room in his hurried and consequential manner, no doubt expecting that so stupendous a threat would stagger the tenacity of the rebel child. Far however from being shaken in the least, that tenacity seemed to acquire additional strength.

“ Sir,” said Carlos, in a resolute voice and manner, “ my choice is already made. Poverty and independence to me are preferable to splendid slavery, and the sacrifice of my most sacred feelings.”

Don Marcos was in his turn surprised that his son should, upon occasions, have such a talent for making fine phrases.

He was not at all satisfied with the success of his rhodomontade ; and he clearly saw, that if his son persisted in his present vein, the *Tesorero-general* would never have an opportunity of serving his country, a mischance deeply mortifying to the feelings of so patriotic a *banquero*. To pull his son by the ears to the altar was not quite feasible, and this indeed was the only alternative left, since fine arguments and dreadful threats had proved totally abortive.

It is a sad oversight in the legislature of nations, that parents have not more efficacious means of enforcing their high commands upon their wilful children than persuasion, threats, or at most a paternal curse, with expulsion from their homes. But this defect, like many others in the laws, will continue, we are afraid, in spite of the dilemma to which it gives rise, circumstanced for instance as the perplexed *banquero* was at the present moment.

"Your stubbornness, señorito," he said, sarcastically, addressing his son, "will I apprehend but indifferently serve your base grovelling schemes, for you must know that by opposing my wishes, you can in no manner accomplish your own. The object of your unworthy passion is now completely out of your power ; and though you may persist in refusing the hand of Paulita, it is now out of all human possibility to bestow yours on the orphan Theresa."

"What, sir !" exclaimed Carlos, struck with amazement ; "you have then compelled the unfortunate girl to enter a convent ?"

"A convent !" cried the father, exultingly, "No, no; my good sir, I have taken no such trouble : Theresa is not a nun, but she is a married woman !"

"Good heavens !" exclaimed the affected Carlos, "who has been guilty of this treachery ! She must have been deceived, forced into some odious union ; but though I may not remedy the evil, I may still have the means of satisfaction, and revenging myself on the unmanly aggressor."

"Foolish boy !" interposed Don Marcos, in a more conciliating tone, "what avails this agitation and indiscreet vaunting ? better far to forget the inconstant girl, and follow the wise dictates of a provident father."

"No—no—no !" cried Carlos, half frantic, and eager to shut his ears to the tidings of so dismal a misfortune. "Not she could not have bestowed her hand on another, without previously acquainting me with her determination."

" You may soon dismiss your doubts, by being introduced to her husband."

" And who is the wretch ?" inquired Carlos, with increased anger. " Who has lent himself to this diabolical plot ? Some mean-spirited villain, no doubt—some base, paltry tool !"

" He is no villain, young sir," said the *banquero*, gravely, " but a young man whom I esteem, and an intimate friend of yours."

Carlos was for a moment lost in deep reverie ; several peculiarities in the conduct of Verdeflor, the last few days, together with the confused intelligence he had received of his having gone to Aranjuez, awoke strange misgivings in his mind ; to prove how far his surmises were just, he abruptly exclaimed—

" Surely, sir, you do not mean Verdeflor ?"

To this interjectional inquiry Don Marcos gave no answer ; but his silence was the best confirmation of his son's suspicions. Carlos appeared visibly distressed at the supposed treachery of his friend, a friend to whom he had given such repeated proofs of his regard.

" I did not expect this from Verdeflor, certainly. Experience teaches us to place confidence in no man."

The *banquero* shrewdly suspected that the latter part of this sentence was levelled at him. With philosophical forbearance, however, he resolved to take no notice of his son's innuendoes ; nor did he attempt to detain him, when Carlos, making a formal bow, thought fit to withdraw from his presence.

Don Marcos had in this instance been carrying his powers of fancy rather too far, and indeed the greatest latitude of hyperbolical language could not excuse, much less justify, the strange assertion he had made concerning the orphan's married state. This false statement of the *banquero* has a still stronger epithet to designate it ; but being rather an ill-bred word, it could not of course find its way here, as we pique ourselves on our predilection for what is polished and elegant. Don Marcos did not trouble his conscience about the sin against veracity which he had been committing, or about the results which it might produce. On the contrary, he inwardly congratulated himself (and here we must observe that this was a favourite occupation with him) on the deep sagacity and high skill which he had displayed on this occa-

MOST UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY.

sion. He had got over the most momentous part of the business, that of announcing the marriage of the orphan. The symptoms of astonishment, horror, and indignation exhibited by his son, were certainly rather alarming; but it was no little thing that could frighten so courageous a man as the *banquero* from acting according to the dictates of his self-will—a quality of which nature had been abundantly lavish in his behalf. With regard to his son's indignation and despair, he came to the satisfactory conclusion which it was his invariable practice to come to. He was fully persuaded that, spite of the beautiful phrases which Carlos had lately put forth about beggary and freedom, the young fellow would have sense enough not to adhere too strictly to that line of elevated philosophy.

To seek out Verdeflor was the next point under consideration, for it was indispensable he should see him before his son, in order to make him an accomplice in the piece of fiction we have just related. Since Verdeflor did not come to the *banquero*, the *banquero* must needs go to Verdeflor, for Don Marcos could not feel persuaded that he had returned from Aranjuez. Under this persuasion he snatched his hat, and went in search of the young madcap with his usual activity.

CHAPTER XII.

MOST UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY.

VERDEFLOL, upon his arrival at Madrid, did not, as we have seen, appear particularly solicitous to present himself before the *banquero* with that elasticity of action which was natural to him. No sooner did he find himself in the company of the Marchioness of Montechico, and immersed in the discussion of the scandalous chronicle of Madrid, than Don Marcos, the orphan, his marriage, his promised fortune, the *beatas* and friars of Aranjuez, and every other person and circumstance connected with his late adventure, vanished totally from his mind. Don Marcos, happily for the tra-

quility of his mind, was not yet acquainted with this oblivious fit in the conduct of his young protégé. He went therefore in search of him with equal confidence and satisfaction ; he visited one after another the various coffee-houses and other customary resorts of Verdeflor ; and then, as if by instinctive impulse, he directed his steps towards the grand mansion of the Marchioness of Montechico.

Scarcely had he come in sight of the place, when he perceived the object of his search proceeding from it, with that gay buoyant manner which was inseparable from his person. Don Marcos in his eagerness actually sprang to meet him. Indeed, forgetting the importance of the *Tesorero-general*, he began to run, like any thoughtless, insignificant fellow in the town ; but a conduct so derogatory to his wonted gravity and constitutional pomposity is partly to be excused on the score of the present delicate posture of his affairs.

"*Valgame Dios !*" he exclaimed, in an anxious tone ; "This is a fine way, Verdeflor, of answering my kindness. Instead of coming to my house immediately upon your return, and acquainting me with every particular that may have happened since our separation, you are here lounging and paying visits at Madrid, as if we had no business of importance on our hands."

"Ah ! *banquero*," cried Verdeflor, with a most provoking laugh ; "here you are ! I knew I should see you soon enough, and therefore I thought it was a waste of trouble to put myself to the inconvenience of going after you. Well, how have you been, my good sir ? How is every one at home ? By-the-by, have you seen the Countess of Belprado ? Is Carlos more assiduous in paying his addresses to Paulita ?"

Here was a multiplicity of questions out of time and place, which failed not to produce a very ominous grin on the demure visage of Don Marcos, who, every one must by this time know, was a zealous lover of propriety in the chapter of asking and answering questions, as in every thing else.

"A proper time this, really, to make such inquiries, when you know I am burning with impatience to gather information from yourself. You are the most provoking young fellow I have seen in all my life, and this want of formality must always prove a bar to your advancement in the world."

"Heaven defend us !" cried Verdeflor, impudently staring the *banquero* in the face. "What ails you, Don Marcos ? I marvel you should talk in a manner so out of season ?"

"Your frivolity," returned the *Tesorero* that was to be, with increasing warmth, "exhausts my patience."

"May the saints guard us from such calamity! What a loss there would be, Don Marcos. I really tremble that any indiscretion of mine should bring any of your heroic virtues into jeopardy."

This bantering strain made Don Marcos as fierce, to use a homely simile almost gone by, as a turkey-cock, and indeed Don Marcos grew almost as red about his gills. It made him as fierce, in short, as any one that cannot vent his rage. When a man can get nothing by being fierce, the best thing he can do is to summon to his aid a little forced composure. Don Marcos had on more than one occasion given sure proof that he could excel in this kind of diplomacy, and therefore, however inconvenient to resort to in the present case, he mastered his anger.

"Now, now, Verdeflor," he said, with a mighty effort at affability; "this is no time really for you to be joking in this manner. Consider the importance of the business in which we are engaged; and, in the name of all the saints, pray give me a faithful account of your reception at my sister's."

"Why, my good sir, replied Verdeflor, "I must confess that I had some very fine sport at your most devout and venerable sister's. She keeps most agreeable society, I see, polite and complaisant to strangers withal."

"Well, well, never mind that; rather tell me how you stand with respect to the orphan."

"A most curious collection by my honour," proceeded Verdeflor, without paying any attention to the feelings of the poor *banquero*; "there was a father Caledonio, quite unique in his way, and a father Sinsoriano, as good a proser and chocolate-drinker as can be found in Spain. Then the female portion of the society was, if possible more agreeable and edifying; there were at least six skinny, dingy, ugly, ill-humoured, cross-looking *beatas*."

"Bah!" cried the impatient Don Marcos; "never mind the *beatas*."

"But I do mind the *beatas*, sir," returned Verdeflor, with mock gravity; "if not ornamental, they are at least useful in a pious, well-regulated nation such as ours. How could frail maidens do without such sufficient guardians?"

"But how do you stand with regard to the orphan?" interrupted Don Marcos, returning to the charge.

"At first," continued Verdeflor, "my reception was not of the most friendly nature."

"How's that?" inquired the alarmed *banquero*.

"Why, sir, I'll tell you that: I was accompanied in my visit by a party of canine friends, who volunteered their attendance without any invitation on my side. The bustle of such an entry did not seem to afford much satisfaction."

"You were certainly to blame, to carry your filthy dogs along with you."

"Softly, Don Marcos, I am no dog-carrier; besides, my dogs have always been accounted remarkably clean and proper. I wish you would come and see them eat, and satisfy yourself on this head."

"Oh! nonsense, you want to laugh at me."

"I could never be guilty of so glaring an impropriety; but really I cannot withhold my observations when the honour of my dogs is concerned."

"But, my good sir," cried the *banquero* in vexation, "what has all this to do with our business? Here you are talking about friars and *beatas*, and your dogs' cleanliness and honour, and the devil knows what else, when you should be giving me a faithful account of your reception by Theresa. I suppose she was not so much offended at your canine friends, as you call them, as to endanger the success of our projects?"

"Softly, Don Marcos, we have not arrived at that part of the story yet. Let things take their natural course, and let us not hurry ourselves."

"Hurry, indeed!" exclaimed the *banquero*, "you are enough to enrage a saint."

"Thank you, sir, you are really very kind to attribute to me such great powers. But to go on with my story: when the *padres* and the *beatas* saw me enter at the door, they doubtless mistook me for some emissary of Satan. How they did stare! But I can stare too, upon occasion, and I gave Father Caledonio a specimen of my abilities in this line, though I must allow Father Caledonio to be no despicable proficient in the art."

"Well, well, but I want to know about Theresa."

"Wait a moment, Don Marcos, that will come soon enough."

"Now my good friend, in mercy to my feelings, spare

all your fine jokes and observations, and come at once to the point. You saw the orphan?"

"I did."

"Is she not beautiful?"

"Charming, bewitching."

"You found her temper amiable?"

"Adorable, Don Marcos."

"That's right. She is full of virtues?"

"I do not doubt it."

"Of course you can love her?"

"Love her?—yes, I can adore her."

"Excellent; she appeared ready, I suppose, to follow our desires?"

"She did, Don Marcos."

"She will make a capital wife—quite a fortune to any reasonable man, who studies domestic happiness."

"You speak like the gospel, Don Marcos."

"Of course you spoke to the orphan about the intended marriage?"

"Certainly."

"Well, and when is it to be celebrated?"

"Never," coolly replied Verdeflor.

"What!" exclaimed Don Marcos. "Now, my good fellow, leave off trifling, for you are surely jesting with me."

"Why, I must confess," resumed Verdeflor, "that to have a good laugh at you is one of the things from which I can extract much pleasure."

"In the name of your honour, if you have any honour at all; do not torture my feelings in this manner. Tell me the truth."

"I have, Don Marcos; but you appear marvellously incredulous to-day. Do you wish me to speak my mind more plainly?"

"Yes, I do," answered Don Marcos, with eagerness.

"Well, then, my worthy señor, I must candidly tell you that you have been planning a piece of mean cowardly rascality, and that you wanted me to be an accomplice. I must add, that you quite mistook your man, when you supposed that my dissipation was in a way synonymous with villainy, and that I could be happy in the possession of that money which I had procured at the expense of an innocent, lovely, and unprotected female's unredeemable wretchedness. Fie,

Don Marcos, I really gave you credit for more skill as a physiognomist."

"But, my good friend," blubbered the astonished *banquero*, in broken accents, "you really do not mean what you say?—you are joking—you are indeed."

"Sir, you seem very hard to be convinced, but happily I can afford you such convincing proofs as will put all your doubts to flight, if my word of honour does not suffice; and now, Don Marcos, I must bid you farewell for the present—I shall pardon for once your abominable plot, but mind you do so no more; for I cannot afford forgiveness so repeatedly to such old sinners as you, who cannot plead in palliation even the warmth of passion, or the inexperience of younger transgressors. Good morning, sir—good morning."

As he said, without further ceremony, he turned away from Don Marcos, and proceeded down the street at a quickened pace.

The bursting of a furious storm is a tremendous thing—the roaring of the ocean in a tempestuous night is very awful—the results of a sanguinary battle are horrid and distressing to the vanquished—the conflagration of a city is fearful to behold—an earthquake is appalling—a pestilence is a dire calamity, and the effects of famine are frightful; but neither a furious storm, the roaring ocean, a battle, or a conflagration, pestilence, or famine, do we deem competent to serve our purpose on the present occasion to illustrate the feelings of Don Marcos. We wished to say something metaphorically awful and portentous concerning the rage, disappointment, and despair of the deluded *banquero*, but we find our total inability to do justice to such a subject. We must therefore leave it to the imagination of our readers. Suffice it to say, that Don Marcos barely escaped suffocation, that a poor dog was the first to experience the effects of his tremendous wrath, and that he finally returned home in such a state of mental agitation as to make his servants suppose he had irrecoverably lost his senses.

CHAPTER XIII.

CROSS PURPOSES.

CARLOS, after his last interview with his father, and the false news which the latter had communicated to him, was anxious to seek out the supposed traitor to friendship as the *banquero* himself. He was in an agony of mind difficult to be expressed, for he could not for a moment doubt that the distressing intelligence was strictly true. He saw his last hope of family aggrandizement now extinguished. His promised happiness had received an irrecoverable blow. He felt that he had no courage to support the burthen of such a life, and the only consolation which he now expected to derive from a continuance of it, was that of wreaking a signal vengeance on his false and ungrateful friend, the destroyer of all his felicity and peace of mind. Full of this indignant feeling he called repeatedly at Verdeflor's, in a state of agitation nearly bordering upon phrensy. When he at last found himself in the presence of the supposed traitor, it was with great difficulty that he could collect sufficient composure to address him in a manner dictated by common good-breeding."

"Sir," he said, sternly addressing Verdeflor, "I have been anxious to thank you in a proper manner for the many favours I owe you."

"My good fellow," replied Verdeflor, carelessly, "I am very sorry you should have been put to the trouble of coming after me. With respect to the favours which you say you owe me, I am really not conscious to what you allude; but, at all events, as I also owe you many favours, a few pecuniary ones too, I believe, this comes very à propos. You know I always stand up for the system of compensation."

"I am not in a laughing mood," returned Carlos, "and you are quite mistaken if you suppose that I came here to listen patiently to your foolery, after the wrongs of which you have been guilty towards me."

"Good heavens, what's the matter with you, Carlos? You don't seem in a good humour, and there is something very unaccountably strange in your words. With respect to

my wronging you, I think you are too severe by half in calling a few indiscretions and slips of memory by so harsh a term."

"Indiscretions, call you them?" repeated Carlos in a tone of bitter irony. "Really, sir, you have got a very soft vocabulary to designate those acts, which, in the common acceptation of the world, are of the blackest die. What, sir, have you not wronged me?—wronged me cruelly, abominably?"

"No, by my soul, I have not," replied the other. "Why, Carlos, what, in the name of goodness troubles you in this manner? I am not conscious of having ever wilfully offended you in the smallest trifle, much less cruelly and abominably as you say. Now, after all, what is the sum of my sins towards you—that of owing you about a thousand dollars, which I should have paid you before now if I had possessed the means. Upon my soul, I could not have imagined you would have been so ungenerous as to tax me with a debt—but I perceive there is no such thing as true disinterested friendship among men."

"In that opinion, sir, I perfectly agree with you," returned Carlos, sarcastically, "since the man whom I had supposed bound to me by the strictest laws of friendship, has proved himself a most ungrateful traitor."

"And in what consists the treachery?" inquired Verdeflor, with perfect *sang froid*.

"You know—you know, sir, full well," replied Carlos, fiercely.

"Here's a storm with a vengeance!—but may I never enjoy the smiles of a pretty face again if I understand you."

"This affected calmness and innocence will not pass current with me; for I am too well informed of all the particulars of the base transaction."

"Are you, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, I am, and by your own accomplice too."

"Indeed, this is wonderful; and pray what base transaction is that you speak of?"

"No foolery, sir, I have already endured too much, and it now only rests with me to tell you that I expect that satisfaction which one injured gentleman is bound to ask from another. I will send a friend to arrange matters with you that we may meet to-morrow morning; till then, farewell, sir!" He said, and suddenly withdrew.

"Why this looks very much like a challenge, but why or wherefore I really cannot surmise. Carlos must be mad; indeed there has been something very strange in his manner for some time past. But then the fellow is so very close and reserved, that no one is ever made acquainted with the secret of his troubles. There is some mystery in this affair which it will be impossible to solve without some cue to aid one's efforts. I a false friend! a traitor! and I have got an accomplice too! What the treachery is, and who the accomplice, Heaven only knows. I have no objection to fight him—but then to fight for mere fighting's sake, and with a friend, does not come within my notions of sound sense and good feeling. I will see Carlos again, and request a more distinct and satisfactory explanation of my supposed treachery." Then suddenly as if illumined by a passing thought, he added, "hollo! now I think all this storm may blow from Aranjuez. Perhaps Carlos has been acquainted with his provident papa's fine schemes, and supposes I have acted a double part—Lord! see what it is to be hasty—Oh! I'll make him look foolish if this should be the cause of his fiery mood."

Verdeflor knew nothing of his friend's affection for the orphan until he had been informed by her of the fact, for Carlos had thought it expedient to keep this circumstance a secret from his most intimate companions. There was a degree of reserve in the young man's character, which was perhaps objectionable in one of his age. That he had some affair of the heart, Verdeflor was shrewd enough to suspect, but who and where the object of his tender *penchant* was, he could not in the least imagine. Besides, Verdeflor had a most happy indifference for those affairs in which he was not a party concerned; and though he was pretty well acquainted with most of the intrigues going forward at Madrid, he owed this knowledge to several adventitious circumstances, more than to a pertinacious curiosity and intrusiveness on his part. Though he talked of every thing, knew every one, and went every where, he had a sort of instinctive abhorrence to return to any place where his presence had not been very welcome in the first instance. This, however, happened but rarely, except in cases of retired, morose, dull people, whose acquaintance Verdeflor felt no particular anxiety to cultivate.

With all this external frivolity and lightness of character, Verdeflor was not a stranger to the nobler impulses of feeling

and gratitude. Of the first we have seen an instance in his conduct towards the orphan, and of the second we find it at present in his anxiety to clear up the misunderstanding existing between him and his friend. We must leave him for the present, and return to Don Marcos Cabezon.

Anger is perhaps, next to love, the most violent of human passions ; and, like love, it is more overpowering when it is produced by unexpected disappointment and a deathblow to our sweetest hopes. These are now combined in the case of the luckless *banquero*, and that his anger was therefore of the most tremendous nature we may easily believe. The ambitious man saw the most brilliant visions of his greatness vanishing from his sight, and the post of *Tesorero-general* eluding his eager grasp. He also saw his prospects of grandeur, of acquiring a firm footing in high society, rapidly diminishing : and he saw that he should have to encounter the sardonic smiles and vexatious remarks of the Countess of Belprado, the scoffs and derision of the whole circle of her acquaintance. These were certainly dreadful calamities, difficult to be supported either by a philosopher of calm temperament or by a man endowed with unusual nerve. Even so great a man as Don Marcos Cabezon was not proof against such a misfortune ; his profound philosophy and amazing fortitude were alike put to rout by the severity of the threatened visitations.

It may, however, afford some consolation to reflect that philosophy and fortitude could well be spared on such occasions ; since these qualities are given to men for the laudable purpose, not so much of supporting their own calamities, as of helping their fellow-creatures with good advice in theirs. Indeed it is in such cases that the maxims of philosophy and fortitude shine with unusual brilliancy. But to return to Don Marcos Cabezon. He was I believe at this moment, utterly forgetful of his character of a philosopher and a man of fortitude, in the consideration of a bamboozled *banquero*.

It was really distressing that so much mischief should have been brought about by the perversity of a son, and the recklessness of a hair-brained fellow, in deciding not to marry when both *ought* to marry for the good of their country and of Don Marcos Cabezon. I leave it to the most calm philosopher to look at this with indifference. All the benefits that Spain was to derive from the transformation of Don

Marcos into a *Tesorero-general* were thus in a moment rendered abortive. Moreover the fine race of the Cabezons were deprived of their right of becoming members of high society, and society was also robbed of such desirable ornaments: Again I repeat that I defy the greatest philosopher to contemplate such dreadful mishaps with perfect resignation. We have thought it necessary to interrupt our narrative with this string of highly moral remarks, in justice to the *banquero* as well as our readers. Otherwise the first might be argued a *non compos*, from his strange conduct, and our readers might stare with wonder to behold such a man as Don Marcos Cabezon acting as he did, without previously dwelling strongly on the great causes which produced these startling effects. After these preliminaries we may venture, with more ease and confidence, to describe the anger of the *banquero*.

No sooner was Don Marcos within his house than he gave free vent to the overwhelming passion with which he was convulsed. He walked about with fearful rapidity and trepidation, and swung his arms in a terrible manner. His eyes flashed fire, and he foamed at the mouth like an enraged bull. Now and then he halted suddenly, and inflicted a most tremendous slap upon his thigh. Next, he began to walk again, and muttered something inaudible between his teeth, it must have been cursing or swearing, we suppose, as these are necessary attendants on the wrath of philosophers, disappointed *banqueros*, and other great men. After this, Don Marcos would cross his arms, and endeavour to think for a moment; but all his reasoning powers were swallowed up in the contemplation of his ruined prospects. With a sudden start he now rings the bell violently. A servant quickly appears, and waits his master's commands. The enraged master, in the confusion and jostling of his thoughts, forgets that he had rung at all, and fiercely demands of the astonished domestic what business he had to come without being called. The servant vanishes immediately. Don Marcos takes two or three other strides, and then he remembers that he had rung, but no one appearing, he rings again most fiercely, for he wanted his son to be called into his presence to favour him with a lecture, since he could do nothing else. At this second ringing a second servant appears. Another fit of oblivion comes over Don Marcos.

"Does your honour call?" inquired the trembling servant.

"No—yes," replied his master, resuming his walk. After a pause, the attendant ventured to say,

"Will your honour signify your commands?"

"Anton!" said the *banquero*, and he paused; then he added, "you must go to—" another pause.

"Yes, señor," returned the obsequious servant, bowing.

But both obsequiousness and bowing were lost upon his master, who now resumed his precipitous walking, and fearful swinging of arms, as if no one were present.

"Where shall I go?" gently demanded Anton, after a lapse of two minutes. Don Marcos, turning fiercely upon the bewildered servant, thundered out—

"Go? go to the devil, thou rascal!"

The affrighted fellow thinking the house was falling about his ears, scampered away like a wild rabbit. Don Marcos meanwhile continued indulging his angry fit. Many were the absurdities he performed derogatory to his dignity. The fury he had conceived against his son and Verdeflor he freely vented against every thing that came in his way, punishing every thing animate and inanimate in his household, merely for the improprieties of two young gentlemen. Thus a beautiful mahogany table first felt the effect of his revengeful fist, and a quiet, tranquil chair, which stood inoffensively by it, was disabled for future service by a tremendous kick. A fine mirror narrowly escaped a similar fate, and, in short, there was scarcely a piece of furniture in the apartment which did not bear testimony to the *banquero's* exasperation.

Indeed, had the fit lasted much longer, the upholsterer would have been excessively obliged by it; and this further illustrates the useful truth, that what causes the misfortune of one, produces some benefit to another. It is also an equally useful and eternal truth, that after a storm succeeds a calm, and thus it happened in the present case. The tempestuous Don Marcos Cabezon felt at length tired of puffing, roaring, stamping, kicking, and playing other tricks of this sort, and his mind fell into a quieter mood of thinking.

A man should always think when he can do nothing else, and to this salutary practice the *banquero* was well accustomed. Don Marcos, crossing one arm behind, and pressing his forehead with the hand of the other, to aid his reflective operations, soon began to experience the benefit of the change. It is astonishing how the attitude assumed by

Don Marcos serves a thinking man, and how that pressure of the forehead is apt to squeeze out luminous ideas. The *banquero* squeezed out a brace of them in a trice ; one that things were not, perhaps, without remedy ; that he might yet succeed in curing the delicate scruples of Verdeflor by a larger dose of pecuniary prescriptions, or by means of his debts threatening him with a prison.

Whilst maturing these speculations, and devising the best plan of carrying them into effect, that wayward fate which had resolved to persecute him was busy at work, to produce another storm worse than any that had yet wrecked the precious argosy of his wit.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE are some *mal à propos* individuals who always contrive to thrust their disagreeable persons on their acquaintances precisely when they are least wanted. Don Deogracias Cabezon was one of these indiscreet individuals. We have already seen the agony which he caused his magnificent brother by his appearance at the late ball. It was now decreed that he should be the origin of fresh vexation to that brother, by obtruding upon his profound reflections. Without any previous announcement he bounced into the apartment in his accoustumed rude and noisy manner, nor did the sight of the *banquero*, lost in a deep reverie, deter him from the unjustifiable intrusion.

"Valgame Dios, Marcos!" he exclaimed, "how thoughtful you seem to-day! Well, I am glad I have found you at home, for I have something most important to communicate."

"Deogracias, I cannot hear you now: so pray leave me."

"Oh, I don't mean to detain you long—five minutes will suffice for my purpose."

"Five minutes!" cried the *banquero*, "I cannot spare one—so again I must desire you to adjourn your visit to a future opportunity."

"But I cannot postpone it," persisted the pertinacious

brother. "My business is urgent, and demands immediate attention."

"Brother," muttered Don Marcos, peevishly, "you are a most provoking man. I wonder your judgment is of so little service to you. I am sure your fears, if nothing else, ought to tell you that it is highly imprudent to disturb a man when he particularly desires to be alone."

"Don't be so morose, Don Marcos," calmly returned Don Deogracias. "I scarcely know you of late. You have grown so proud and so ambitious since you affect the acquaintance of great people, that you begin to treat your nearest relatives like dogs."

"And such treatment is even too good for them, when they are as obstinate as you are at present," retorted the *banquero*, sharply.

"Where have you learned such maxims? Not in the gospel, I am sure—but you never read the gospel, nor any other pious book: therefore it is no miracle you should have become so profane and so forgetful of your Christian duties."

Don Deogracias Cabezon, though an eloquent preacher, had certainly ill chosen the hour for his sermon. Don Marcos was not in a fit state to hear evangelical truths; and it is doubtful whether the best preacher in Spain would have succeeded in such a task. His brother's pious rebuke, therefore, instead of conciliating his temper, only tended the more to irritate him.

"In the name of Satan, Deogracias," he cried, "do you wish to drive me mad with your misplaced observations?"

"No, I don't," replied Don Deogracias, with seraphic tranquillity; "I only came to engage you to contribute to a most devout undertaking. There is a project for erecting a new chapel to the Virgin of Mercies at—"

"Well, that is nothing to me," said the surly *banquero*.

"Don't say so, my dear brother—you must not forget that you were born at Tembleque, and that you are a Christian—a very rich Christian too, and therefore obliged to contribute to the erection of the said chapel in proportion to your means."

This method of reasoning did not strike Don Marcos as being strictly logical, however pious it might be; with much vexation and acrimony he accordingly said to the fraternal envoy—

"Deogracias, you were always a fool, but I never cou

have supposed that you would have carried your impertinence and ignorance so far as to tell me that I am obliged to give my money away for the purpose of building useless chapels, because I have been born a Christian, and been indolent enough to get a fortune."

"Virgen del Tremedal!" ejaculated the scandalized Don Deogracias, "here is proper language for a Catholic! Marcos, Marcos, I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself. So you want to be exempt from the fulfilment of all your Christian duties? Useless chapels you call them, too! Heaven defend us! you are in a more dangerous way than I suspected, brother. Useless chapels! Why, yes, every thing that is not profane and worldly is superfluous in your estimation."

"Hold, brother! I want to hear no more."

"But you must hear, Marcos. If you are negligent of the interests of your soul, I at least am not; and therefore I am bound to speak my mind on the occasion without fear or compromise. It is but a few moments ago that Father Bernardo was telling me—"

"Confound Father Bernardo!" interrupted Don Marcos, impatiently.

Don Deogracias stared for a while in mute astonishment. Then he resumed:—

"Alas! these are the sad effects of Napoleon's invasion. You were once a good Christian, brother, and I used to see you regularly at mass and confession. Then the company of good friars was not unacceptable to you; but those happy times are gone, and now, with horror and shame I see that a man who calls himself a Christian, scruples not to squander away his money in giving sumptuous entertainments to vainglorious people, yet he refuses to contribute to the erection of a chapel to the Virgin of Mercies. Let me ask you, brother, do you really believe in God? Do you forget that there is a dreadful place of retribution, not only for infidels and heretics, but also for the lukewarm Christian? Have you no thoughts for the future welfare of your soul, or do you really believe that you have no soul at all?"

"I tell you what, Deogracias, I have not chosen you for my father-confessor, and therefore I desire you not to trouble yourself with the concerns of my soul, but rather to leave me immediately, or you will compel me to quit the

house. A fine time this to come and bore me with friars, chapels, and nonsense, when I am labouring under all the agony of an impending calamity."

Don Deogracias Cabezon, shocked at the profane language used by his brother, now began assiduously to cross himself. This pious employment increased the vexation and impatience of the *banquero*.

"Begone, thou saintly hypocrite!" he thundered out.

"Hypocrite! Oh, you sinner. Such is the language which wicked men have always in their mouths, when they speak of those true Christians who are zealous in the discharge of their duties."

"I tell you to begone!"

"And so you will not subscribe to the erection of the chapel to the Virgin of Mercies?"

"No, I will not," returned the other, fiercely—"not a single maravedi—not one."

"That's right, better keep your money to satisfy the dissipation and vices of vain men. Oh, thou blind and deluded mortal! Some day wilt thou repent of this."

"*Maldigate el Cielo!*" roared out Don Marcos.

"Jesus Maria!" fervently ejaculated the other.

"Begone, or I'll throw you out of the window."

"Heaven keep us in its grace! the poor man is mad, mad—"

Don Marcos made a violent movement towards his brother, and his brother, no doubt to prevent the commission of farther sins, hastened, at a quick pace, out of the house.

This untimely visit of Don Deogracias completely demolished the *banquero*'s fine edifice of reflection. It is always disagreeable to be interrupted with money-asking visits, even when for the pious purpose of erecting chapels, and it is highly imprudent to distract the attention of a deeply absorbed mind by obtrusive remarks on a future state of things. Thus it happened now; the imprudent Don Deogracias, by not choosing his time properly, failed in his undertaking, made his brother appear in a very unchristian light, and renewed all his inflammatory propensities. Sad effects of indiscretion. After this fine piece of moralizing, nothing can come more appropriate than to end a chapter.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIGON.*

THE revolution of the Isla de Leon was making rapid progress in various provinces of Spain. The towns of Corunna and others had already declared themselves in favour of the constitution, and it was expected that many others would soon follow their example. Madrid was at present in a state of anxious suspense. It was a prevailing opinion that the king would swear to the constitution, while many others strongly maintained that he would never be brought to accede to a new order of things.

But among the many persons who seemed deeply interested in the passing events, it may appear strange that the miscreant Enriquez should be one of the most conspicuous. In what way this comparatively insignificant individual could be affected by recent occurrences, might seem to savour of mystery, since neither his station in life, his character, or his principles, admitted the probability of his ever bestowing a thought upon the fate of his country. Yet his countenance exhibited evident symptoms of alarm, in proportion as the revolution gained ground, and the opinion concerning the king's adopting a new form of government became more general. Some circumstance of an extraordinary nature must have occupied his active, scheming, and dark mind; he became sullen and taciturn, sedulously avoiding the society of his former companions. His unfortunate mistress, he treated not only with his accustomed disrespect, but even with marks of pointed scorn. Since the evening he saw the shrouded and mysterious *hidalgo* at the coffee-house, his sombre temper was considerably augmented. He was now in fearful agitation, closeted in his apartment; then he seemed to be maturing some deep thought, and the horrid glitter of his eye and the malignant curl of his lip plainly indicated that the scheme was of a desperate nature. Some-

* A low eating-house.

times he walked hurriedly about the room, then he would halt suddenly, and fall into a new train of thought : apparently by his indecision he seemed to be weighing the probable advantages and perils attendant on the execution of his speculations.

"It must be done," he muttered in a tone of ominous import, "no other course is now left me. Ruin follows me close, and unless the blow be struck, and struck immediately, I am lost. It is a desperate measure, but whether I succeed or fail in the attempt, it is now rendered strictly necessary. Should the king be prevailed upon to swear to the constitution, and every appearance seems to favour this supposition, my precautions will come too late, and dishonour, ruin, perhaps a scaffold, will be the unavoidable end I am to expect. I must seek out that villain El Zurdo, and engage him to lend his aid to the accomplishment of my design. Let me see," he then added in a vacillating tone, "shall I not put myself too much in the miscreant's power by this last step. If he refuse his consent, my situation will be doubly perilous—besides, my late neglect in satisfying his avarice has no doubt awakened the most rancorous feelings in his heart. But, no, no, I must not let my judgment be darkened by false alarms ; the fellow's avarice is greater than every other consideration, even that of revenge. This soothing conviction must set my doubts at rest ; a liberal sum bestowed in time, and the hope of a still more handsome one, upon the fulfilment of my plan, will induce the wretch to serve my purposes without fear or remorse. It is decided, my intentions must be communicated this very night."

Having formed this resolution, his lowering features acquired a degree of composure, and his heart began to feel that sort of dark repose arising from the tranquillity of determined guilt. That day he affected to treat the Countess of Belprado with unwonted respect, and his comrades with more than usual affability. The countess, who studiously avoided the sight of her odious and insolent menial, but was not always successful in her endeavours, owing to his boldness and arrogance, was now powerfully struck with the apparent change in his behaviour. Strange misgivings rose in her mind that some dark deed, or at least some act of villainy was in contemplation. Her uneasiness was augmented, but she endeavoured to repress her sensations, in order not to give Enriquez any suspicion of her unfavourable surmises.

she resolved, however, to be upon her guard against any sudden manœuvres of the miscreant.

In this state of suspense her mind suffered dreadfully, nor was her situation rendered less appalling and distressing by the feigned calmness she was obliged to put on before her daughter and the rest of the family. The same night, Enríquez, enveloping himself in his cloak, left the house with the utmost secrecy. That his expedition had for its object the dark plans that had occupied his thoughts during the day, it is not difficult to suppose. But before we can communicate it to our readers it is expedient we should introduce them to other company.

At a suspicious-looking house, in the parish of *Las Maravillas*, which served the ostensible purposes of a *figon*, and might as well serve those of any villany, a *manolo* gently knocked and soon obtained admittance. After groping his way through a dark, narrow passage, he found himself in a spacious, though low and dingy place, which answered the double views of a kitchen and eating-room. In the middle stood a short rude table, round which two or three suspicious-looking fellows were leisurely sitting at supper. Their attire, language, and deportment, all induced the belief that they belonged to the class of *manolos* of the poorer and more desperate description. The master of the *figon*, a dark-complexioned man, blind of one eye, and strongly pitted with the smallpox, was calmly standing by his guests, and with a sarcastic smile surveyed the progress which they made in demolishing the quantity of abominable fare which he had placed for their meal. The malicious leer of his eye, together with his easy impudence, clearly indicated that he was as consummate a rogue as any of his craft in Madrid.

"Blessed be our Lady!" he now said, in a jocular tone, addressing the new comer, "how is this, Señor Zurdo, you are rather late to-night, and I began to feel apprehensive that you would not taste the dainty banquet which I had prepared for you and our comrades here."

"Ah! Master Mateo," quoth El Zurdo, "you are very kind in sooth, but I hope I am not too late?"

"Oh! no, señor," returned Mateo, "not at all, for I have a delicious *pastel* in reserve, which the King of Spain himself might be glad to taste. So take your seat and be welcome. I suppose," he then added, with a knowing shake of the head, "that some business of importance has

distrained you ? but I am not a curious man, and I don't care to pry into things that do not concern me."

" Ah, by San Juan," replied El Zurdo, " you are the most discreet of all the tribe of *figoneros*, and believe me, I would not hesitate to intrust you with my secret affairs. But the fact is, that I have none at present, with which the whole town, or the supreme *Consejo de Castilla* itself, might not be safely acquainted. But tell me, Tostado," he then continued, addressing himself to one of the ruffians at supper, " any news stirring ?"

" None, by the holy St. Joseph, none," replied Tostado, with a discontented air. " Business is quite flat, and we and our friends the *alguacils* will soon be obliged to change profession, or starve, if things continue much longer in this manner. I suppose you have heard of the strange disappearance of Pizpierno from our accustomed haunts ?"

As he said, he fixed a penetrating stare on El Zurdo, who, nevertheless, remained perfectly tranquil and composed.

" Why, yes," he replied, with much unconcern, " I have heard something about it. But I suppose he is gone to Seville, as I believe there is better employment and more pickings to be had in that city now than in Madrid. I wonder what makes the capital of Spain so dull now ?—I think the *manolos* are grown mad, for I caught two of them but yesterday talking about politics, and the devil knows what."

" Well, but," interrupted Tostado, " what have we to do with politics, except indeed as they may be the means of creating some confusion which may serve our turn ?"

" *Camaradas*," quoth Mateo, " this affair of Pizpierno is worth looking into, for a confused rumour that he has been sent to a better world has reached my ears, and there may be, perhaps, a reward offered to the discoverer of the brave man who signed his passport. You know this is one of the most profitable branches of our concern, and that we always betray to justice even those of our own fraternity, taking care, however, to apprise beforehand the delinquent, and giving him a share of the reward offered for his apprehension ; a most prudent practice, and by which we oblige justice, clear our consciences, and serve ourselves. If the man escape, so much the better, he may live to procure another job ; and if he be caught and hanged, it serves him right for being a clumsy fellow. An example is made, the people are edified, and we get the merit of the thing."

This fine piece of persuasive oratory of Seor Mateo was completely thrown away upon El Zurdo. He listened with much gravity and with acquiescent nods of the head to the discreet observations of the *figonero*. But he was not fool-hardy enough to become the dupe of fine speeches. The keen scrutinizing looks of Tostado, and Mateo's words were thus of no avail. El Zurdo knew that the *figonero's* statement had been verified on many occasions, but then he would not place too much faith in this sort of diplomacy when his own safety was personally concerned. His exploits were already so numerous that he was not anxious to add to the list the murder of Pizpierno, on which subject he had made an oath to keep an inviolable secrecy. Now El Zurdo was too much of a gentleman and a Christian to break such an obligation. Instead, therefore, of declaring himself the assassin of their missing comrade, he thought the best thing he had to do was to add a few fine phrases to those which the *figonero* had already propounded on the subject.

"My brave Mateo," he said, "your words do credit to that sagacity for which you have always been noted, and I think with you that we are in duty bound to discover any thing which we know concerning the fate of Pizpierno. For my part, gentlemen, I am anxious to know what's become of him; as I have a little account to settle with him, and I should not be sorry to make him taste two or three inches of my *cuchillo*. I am, therefore, more interested than any one else in ascertaining whether he is really dead or alive."

This was said with an air of such perfect coldness as quite to disconcert his worthy companions. After a few other attempts they abandoned their inquiries altogether; for if El Zurdo was truly, as they suspected, the murderer of Pizpierno, they foresaw that they would rather endanger the prospects of a reward for his apprehension, by putting him too much upon his guard, after he had once evinced his disinclination to discover himself. The conversation was accordingly directed to another channel.

"Now, Seor Mateo," quoth Tostado, "when is that famous pie coming? You see that we have done ample honour to your domestic hare."

"By our Lady, Tostado," replied Mateo, smiling, "you will never lose your joke. Commend me to you for a merry wag, although this time your wit has been completely misplaced, for as I hope for salvation, the animal you have just

-buried in your stomachs had been bred in the woods. It has not been in my house above a day."

"That may be," quoth now El Zurdo, with a leer, "and I dare say some poor old woman in the neighbourhood might vouch for the truth of your assertion, though she might deplore that you first caught sight of the hare. But I believe places about here are well stocked with this sort of game, which cannot but be very convenient to one of your profession—Eh, Seor Mateo?"

"Ah, ah, ah!" exclaimed Mateo, laughing, "what makes you think that game is so very plentiful about here?"

"Why, my good fellow, I often see it lying dead about the streets. But I hope, in all conscience, that you provide yourself from more reputable markets."

The *figonero* now placed the much vaunted *pastel* upon the table. It was a large mass of thick dirty crust, from the contents of which issued a filthy stream, enough to poison any nostrils except those of the present company.

"There's a delicate morsel for you," quoth the master of the house. "Zeserino himself might be proud of such a *pastel*, and I am sure that his elegant customers at the *Calle del Leon* would give him many thanks for it."

"*Menos palabras*," observed Tostado, "you begin, Master Mateo, to exact applause before it is due. Now let us see the contents of the *pastel*. I will carve it."

"Is it a fowl or a meat pie, Mateo?" inquired El Zurdo.

"It is made of the most tender and delicious veal," answered the *figonero*.

"If that be the case," retorted El Zurdo, with a grin, "common charity, and the spirit of religion require that we should perform a certain pious ceremony before we begin to eat it." Saying this, he stood up, and very gravely crossing the *pastel*, in a solemn voice, continued: "now, *camaradas*, and good Christians, be pleased to say a short but fervent prayer for the repose of him whose mortal remains have provided this delicate morsel, as the *figonero* calls it."

This profane sally did neither lessen the good humour of Master Mateo, nor take away the appetite of his guests. Such horrid and disgusting ribaldry was common to them, and Tostado, wishing to improve El Zurdo's jest, quickly said,

"Hold, *caballeros*! we must not bestow our prayers on unworthy objects, who assures us that this is not a horse, or a heretic, rather than a Christian pie?"

"True, true," returned El Zurdo, "this ought to be investigated, for if the defunct be a heretic, our prayers will be thrown away, for there can be no salvation for him. Therefore, let good Mateo give us a true account, before we proceed any further. Is it a Christian pie or not?"

CHAPTER XVI.

Mateo did not seem much disposed to satisfy this query, when happily the conversation was interrupted by a sharp knock at the door. They all started at the sound, for no more guests were expected that night, and the knocking, too, seemed more like that of an *alguacil* than of one of the fraternity.

"Blessed be our Lady!" exclaimed Mateo, "who can that be at this time of night? 'Tis near eleven."

Another knock, still louder, followed it.

"He seems impatient, whoeyer he be," quoth El Zurdo, drawing his *cuchillo*; "but we must be prepared for unwelcome visiters; gentlemen, are your weapons fine?"

"Very," said the others, with one accord.

"Be prudent, *caballeros*, in the name of St. Joseph," cried the *figonero*, interposing, "do not allow a rash act to bring ruin and disgrace upon my establishment. Let me open the door, and you keep quiet here, for I dare say I shall find some means of sending any new guests away, if I deem that their presence is likely to prove unwelcome to any of you."

He then took a light, and gently went to the door: El Zurdo and his companions were not entirely at ease notwithstanding the observations of Mateo. They kept themselves on the alert, for in spite of their good opinion of the *figonero*, they did not know how far his affection for them might stand the test of a good bribe. Shortly after, Mateo returned with a stranger closely muffled up. The suspicions of the party increased. They all with a simultaneous movement started upon their feet and grasped their weapons.

"Hold, *caballeros!*" cried Mateo, "put up your *cu-chillos*, there is no danger. This new visiter is a friend."

"What is his business?" gravely inquired Tostado.

"None with you, sir Bully," answered the stranger; who then throwing his cloak on one side discovered himself to be Enriquez.

"Blessed be our Lady! It is Señor Enriquez. Let me entreat you to remain a few minutes, and partake of this excellent *pastel*."

"Thank you, Seor Mateo, but I cannot wait a moment, tempting as your cheer is—now, Master Zurdo, are you ready and willing to follow me?"

El Zurdo deliberated for a moment, as if uncertain what course to adopt. He plainly saw that some desperate act was contemplated, to the accomplishment of which his concurrence and aid were requisite. His conscience seemed to awaken some scruples; but lest our readers should misapprehend us, we must observe, that these scruples arose less out of any compunctuous visitings, than from the circumstance of the affair being undertaken at the instigation of Enriquez. That this worthy was not very ready to meet the demand of his agents has already been shown, and El Zurdo felt shy of embarking in any further enterprise, without making sure of a reward suitable to the service required. The penetrating glance of Enriquez quickly read his doubts; but he affected not to understand him. On the contrary, with much indifference he observed—

"Mind, Zurdo, I do not wish to put you to any particular inconvenience. The affair which I have in hand is exceedingly profitable, and I feel easy on the score of finding a ready coadjutor. I therefore merely wish to give you the preference, that is all. Instead of coming to ask a favour, my intention is to confer one."

The announcement of an exceedingly profitable business made the whole party prick up their ears, and fix their eager looks on Enriquez. The readiness of each individual of the party to accept the proffer of the new comer, was stamped on his countenance. Even the rogue of a *figonero* rolled his solitary eye with glee, the sole ornament of his repulsive face. Enriquez perceived with secret joy these favourable symptoms on the part of the desperadoes; for though loath to rely on them, half as much as on the cool and reckless boldness of El Zurdo, he was sensible that the fear

of a profitable job passing into their hands would act upon this villain as a double stimulus to bring him to his own terms. His surmises were just. El Zurdo, as soon as he perceived the evident eagerness of his comrades, expeditiously applied himself to thwart their designs. Putting on a very grave face, he said—

“Gently, Señor Enriquez—I marvel a man of your experience should be so hasty—you appear to call in question my zeal and readiness to oblige you, when you ought, by repeated proofs, to be convinced of the contrary. This is really ungrateful on your part.”

“Well, brave Zurdo,” replied Enriquez with a sneer, “I crave forgiveness if I have offended your delicacy and sense of honour; and it now only remains for me to put your fine professions to the test. So, if you can forego the temptation of the present feast, you must accompany me from hence without loss of time.”

El Zurdo immediately rose, snatched his cloak and hat, and was ready to depart. His worthy companions beheld this with looks of disappointment, but ventured not to give utterance to their discontent; for according to the implied rules of the society, they had no right to interfere with the preference accorded to any one of its members.

“Lead on, Señor Enriquez,” said El Zurdo, “I am ready; and you, *caballeros*, I hope, will excuse my absence?”

“Brave Zurdo,” quoth Tostada with visible spite, “go where duty calls you, and we shall make shift to sustain your momentary loss with Christian resignation.”

“Good night, gentlemen,” said Enriquez. “Heaven bless you!”

“The Lord accompany you!” responded Mateo, as both Enriquez and El Zurdo quitted the place.

A moment of silence was observed, and then the members of the worthy party eagerly returned to their interrupted supper, enlivened with the accustomed coarse jokes, and succeeded by more important conjectures concerning the nature of the business for which their companion had been hurried away.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ASSASSIN'S BARGAIN.

THE night was extremely dark, and particularly adapted to any expedition in which Enriquez and his ally might be engaged. Scarcely had they left the tavern, when the first, anxious to conclude his transaction as soon as possible, addressed the *manolo* in the following terms :—

" Zurdo, although you seem to have lost part of that confidence which you once reposed in me, I am anxious to give you a convincing proof of my eagerness to renew our acquaintance upon its former footing."

" Ay, the Virgin bless you, Señor Enriquez," quoth El Zurdo, sarcastically, " I always found you remarkably smooth and complaisant whenever you stood in need of my services. Let us have no palavering, but come to the point at once. Explain what's required of me, and what my reward is to be. I will then tell you whether I can meet your wishes or not."

" You are a bold straightforward fellow," observed Enriquez; " I like this frankness of disposition, for it argues that you are the right man. But since you are such a strenuous friend to plain-dealing and expedition, I hasten to communicate my purpose, though I must forewarn you that it is one of a most delicate and perilous character."

" Proceed, Señor," returned El Zurdo, " you ought to know that difficulties vanish like smoke, when El Zurdo is determined upon a thing."

" First, my brave fellow," resumed Enriquez, in a low mysterious tone, " I must acquaint you with a piece of news that will perhaps startle you. No doubt you recollect having told me, some time since, that in a scuffle which you had with Pizpierno, on *noche buena*, you had been frightened away by the sudden apparition of the spectre of our former victim?"

" The Virgin, and the holy St. Joseph be witness for me," interrupted El Zurdo, in an impressive manner, " that I spoke truth, and nothing but the truth. The spectre I saw as clearly as I now see you ; and of this I will take my oath on the Bible. So I pray you, Señor Enriquez, not to doubt my veracity, or ridicule my fears on this subject."

"I wish to do neither," replied Enriquez, seriously; "but I must correct an error under which you labour. What you suppose to have been a spectre was a real man of flesh and blood, just as you and I—"

"*Virgin de Atocha,*" ejaculated the *manolo*, "you want to make merry with me. How can it be possible, unless by the interposition of a miracle?"

"Why, yes," quoth Enriquez, "such a resuscitation savours a little of the supernatural. Yet, what I assert is true; and whatever may have been the means by which this supposed dead man started into life, the fact of his being really alive at Madrid is sufficient to excite our deepest alarm, without troubling ourselves with any useless investigations or conjectures."

"But are you really certain, Señor Enriquez, of what you say?"

"I was too much interested in ascertaining the truth not to determine that. I saw him for the first time in a coffee-house at the *calle de Alcala* the very night I gave you the *doblones*. The apparition seemed so extraordinary and unnatural, that it was long before I could believe my eyes. I approached the object of my surprise, and surveyed him minutely till I could entertain no further doubts concerning the identity of his person. I left the coffee-house in a state of anxiety you may easily conceive, and during that horrid night I endeavoured in vain to persuade myself that the person I had seen was only one resembling him. It was himself. I have since wandered in all the places of public resort at Madrid, with the view of again meeting him. My endeavours for some time proved fruitless: but I met him once more in close converse with a young gentleman, who has all along been strongly suspected of being connected with the revolutionists of the *Isla de Leon*. It was then in broad daylight that I saw him. I followed him at a short distance for more than an hour, and examined his person with scrupulous care; my conviction of his identity was only the more fully established. Now, Zurdo, it is almost needless to add, that both you and I have good reason to be alarmed at this unexpected turn of affairs—"

"But he cannot discover himself," suddenly observed El Zurdo.

"Alas! my good fellow, do not place confidence in such slender hopes," returned Enriquez. "If unfortunately, as every one seems to believe, this accursed constitution should

be accepted by the king, how shall we prevent those terrible discoveries from being made? Let us not delude ourselves, but rather exert ourselves to remove the dreaded evil with all possible expedition."

"Well, Señor Enriquez! how is that to be done?" inquired the *manolo*, in a sombre voice.

"My brave Zurdo," muttered Enriquez, in smothered accents, "you must be aware that something daring and desperate is the only remedy left us."

The *manolo* returned no answer, and a gloomy silence was some time observed by both parties.

"Zurdo," said the miscreant Enriquez, at last, "I always held you to be a thoroughly brave and resolute man."

"So far," returned the *manolo* with a grin, "your thoughts are just. Proceed, Señor Enriquez."

"The risk we run in that man's remaining at Madrid must be obvious to you."

"Oh! yes, though I must tell you, that the danger inclines more to your side than to mine."

"Hold! Zurdo," returned the other, a little discontentedly, "you must not deceive yourself; the danger is equal to both. Your share in the transaction was fully as important as mine."

"Well, well," gravely retorted El Zurdo, "I will not dispute the matter. So let me hear the fine contrivance your genius has hit upon, to remove this unwelcome visiter from Madrid?"

"Zurdo, you are very dull of apprehension to-night. You surely ought to know that there is but one way of setting all our fears at rest."

An awful pause followed, after which Enriquez, in an impressive whisper, continued—

"He must die."

"That is easily said, Señor Enriquez," dryly observed El Zurdo, "but not quite so easily done."

"Mind, Zurdo, I mean to be generous."

The *manolo* uttered an imperfect sound, which denoted any thing but assent.

"Upbraid me not, my good friend; for this time you yourself shall fix the price of your services."

"And who assures me of punctuality on the chapter of payment?"

"You shall have one-third of the stipulated sum this night, and the rest the moment after the commission of the deed."

"Ah! by our Lady, it is for that rest that I feel great apprehensions."

"You shall have any securities you can desire."

Enriquez now drew from under his cloak a purse, which he held to the *manolo*.

"Zurdo, this purse contains a thousand rials, which you may secure this moment, two thousand more will be paid you at the appointed time."

"*Valgame Dios!*" exclaimed El Zurdo, indignantly, "and you think this, Señor Enriquez, sufficient recompense for so perilous an undertaking? What a conscience you must have! No, by my soul, as I am a Christian, and hope for salvation, I cannot meet your views upon such low terms. Three thousand rials! Holy St. Joseph, what a proposal! Why, sir, if you offered twice the money I would not accept it."

"My good Zurdo," returned Enriquez, "speaking of consciences, methinks yours is not remarkably scrupulous, when you hint at such an exorbitant price."

"Call it exorbitant, if you please," returned El Zurdo; "but, by our blessed Lady, I vow I will not take a rial less than what I have said. And of this, too, I must have half immediately."

Enriquez remained for a moment plunged in deep reverie. The sum required appeared to him rather extensive, and he was one of those provident rascals who are always willing to get a villainy performed at as cheap a rate as possible. The imminence of the danger, however, made him on the other hand loath to reject the villain's terms. This vacillating mood did not escape Zurdo's observation, and he almost felt chagrined that he had not raised his demands still higher.

"Ah! Señor Enriquez;" he said, "this is no trifling affair in which I am going to embark, and I must bid farewell to Madrid as soon as the job is performed. I shall accordingly be in great need of a large sum to cover my travelling expenses. Think sir, likewise, of the necessity we are under of being continually well provided with *unto Mexicano*, to keep at bay such troublesome insects as *alguacils* and others, who are always on the alert to tease us brave fellows. Consider all this, and you will find that the required sum is barely sufficient to answer all these purposes."

"You speak sensibly, Zurdo," replied Enriquez, "and you urge your arguments with skill that does you honour;

but at the same time I must confess that you somewhat exaggerate things. However, we will not quarrel about the matter, and to settle the difference, let me offer you four thousand rials for your kind assistance."

"By my hopes of salvation," cried El Zurdo, eagerly, "I tell you, Señor Enriquez, I will not lower my terms a single *echavo*. Therefore, let us have done with this bargaining. Now you may decide one way or the other, for I am tired of arguing it; besides, I have got other business to attend to, and I cannot afford to be losing my time in this manner."

"Well, Zurdo," said Enriquez, with a sigh, "have your own way. I suppose I must give you the money, for you are as stubborn as any self-willed mule in Spain, and when once a thing has got into your head, not all the remonstrances in the world will rid you of it."

"Thank you, Señor Enriquez," answered the ruffian, impudently, "thank you for your good opinion of my character! and now bless my eyes with the sight of those six thousand angels in the shape of rials."

"My good fellow, be not so hasty! I am ready to pay you the stipulated sum to the last *maravedi*. I swear by my honour—"

"Hold, señor Enriquez," interrupted the *manolo*, with a sarcastic smile; "do not swear by that, or I shall begin to tremble for the safety of my money."

"But the fact is, Zurdo, that I have not got that sum about me. By all that is sacred I have not, and you may search me if my word is not security enough to hush your doubts; you may, indeed."

"No, señor," replied his tool, "I had rather be exempted from the trouble, but I am sorry that since you are unfortunately thus situated, I cannot serve your turn. As for trusting you, my good señor, that is quite out of the question, for without impeaching your honour, you have on certain occasions had a deficiency of memory that is quite astonishing."

"Stay, Zurdo, is there no way of settling this foolish difference?" inquired Enriquez, eagerly.

"Let me see," replied the other, with a sort of consequential gravity, "I am willing to serve my friends, and I don't like to put them to any inconvenience if I can help it. Señor Enriquez, I suppose you have got a watch?"

"I have," dryly returned Enriquez.

"A gold one, most likely?"

"Yes, a gold one."

"One, I imagine, which may be worth about two thousand rials?"

"Yes, and more, but what of that? I cannot conceive that you have the ungenerous design of depriving me of it. I cannot part with it," he then added, with a malignant smile, "it is the gift of a lady, and I am not so ungallant as to part with their favours in this manner. Therefore, you must not think to become the possessor of it."

"But I don't want to become the possessor of it," replied the *manolo*, "my wish for that watch is only with the view of keeping it as a pledge for the fulfilment of our treaty. Upon the delivery of the five thousand rials you shall have it again. So now, give me the purse with the other thousand."

"No, no, Zurdo, this will never do; the watch will be a sufficient guarantee. You tax my memory with fits of oblivion, and mayhap yours might be exposed to the same defect if I gave you the money and the watch. Who knows, but you might think such a prize obtained without trouble preferable to double the recompense with it?"

This dexterous bout of sparring between the two miscreants was at length terminated by the *manolo's* accepting the proposal of his employer. As they were well acquainted with the villainy of each other, they were both eager to secure the means of having their mutual wishes fulfilled.

"Come, give me the watch," muttered El Zurdo, gruffly, putting forward his hand.

Enriquez delivered the required pledge, but at the same time another difficulty arose. Some sudden thought seemed to dart across him, and on the point of separating, he eagerly got hold of the *manolo* to detain him.

"Stay, Zurdo," he said, in a hesitating tone, "we have not done as yet. You have required a pledge of me, and it is but just I should obtain a like security."

"Blessed St. Joseph! what mean you, Señor Enriquez? What the devil of a pledge can you wish for? Do you doubt my resolution and courage? I am not such a cold, chicken-hearted rascal as ever to be troubled with foolish qualms? Here's plenty of security for you. Can you wish for a better?"

As he pronounced these words, he drew from under his cloak his large *cuchillo*, a sharp double-edged blade, with a horn handle; the fearful weapon shone in the moonlight, as the ruffian displayed it. Enriquez, however, did not seem to be satisfied with the offered security. For, though he felt

secure that a single blow, well directed from that weapon, would be sufficient for its purpose, yet he entertained some doubts whether that blow would be inflicted at all.

"Now, Zurdo, you will not be offended at my misgivings," said Enriquez; "when you come to claim your prize, how shall I be sure that the object for which it was offered has been attained? There is no use in mincing the matter. I am not quite at ease on the subject of his death, for you may be off with my money before I have had time to ascertain whether the deed has been really accomplished or not."

"That's very unkind of you, Señor Enriquez," replied the villain, "but take any precautions you please, I shall pardon them, in consideration of your anxiety."

"Well, Zurdo," returned Enriquez, in a lower tone, "suppose you bring me some token."

"What token do you want?"

"Why, I am not particular about that, provided you present me with a sufficient one. What, for example, think you of bringing me the ears of the dead man?"

"I will do it," returned El Zurdo, with horrid calmness.

"Then every thing is settled. To-morrow night the business may be done. Our enemy goes often to the *Café de Solito*, and I have observed him of late to take a solitary walk at night on the *Prado*. I need tell you no more. Your sagacity and knowledge will direct you in the choice of time and place."

"Ay, ay, leave that to me," answered the desperado, coolly. "Be assured, that by this time to-morrow the man will be as dead as my grandmother. And now, farewell, for I hear the bell of a neighbouring convent, and I think I may as well go in and say a prayer. I have been rather remiss in my duties as a Christian of late, and this is as good an opportunity of showing a little devotion as any other. Here we are almost arrived at the entrance of the convent. Will you come in?"

"Why, no," replied Enriquez, with a sneer, "devotion must be spontaneous, and I would rather prefer getting into bed at this time than into a church. So good night, my most pious friend, and may your orisons be gratefully acknowledged in the celestial court."

Saying this, he left the *manolo* near the convent, and made his way towards the Countess of Belprado's mansion with considerable expedition.

El Zurdo now very deliberately took off his hat, and entered the church with much respect. He placed his murderous fingers in the basin of holy water, and made thrice the sign of the cross over his face; then he knelt, and seemed very much taken up with the drowsy, monotonous Latin words which a few sleepy friars were quickly mumbling over.

El Zurdo was indeed one of the most pious cut-throats and religious rascals about Madrid. He was armed with a good rosary, as well as with a good weapon, and was no doubt quite as expert and assiduous in the handling of the one as the other. He was, besides, a zealous devotee of St. Joseph and the Virgin of *Atocha*, and he had likewise half a dozen favourite saints to whom he occasionally addressed a complimentary prayer, and to whom also, when business was carried on with profit, he never failed to make a present of a yellow wax light. This piety of the *manolo* was very exemplary and very edifying withal to some friendly friars whom he now and then favoured with smuggled tobacco. The alliance between the rosary and the *cuchilla*, which to some persons may appear unnatural, was, upon the whole, rather creditable to the taste, judgment, and equity of El Zurdo, for if with one he happened to send a fellow-creature to the other world, he had also the other most conveniently at hand to pray for the repose of his soul. El Zurdo's fit of devotion being over, he very leisurely stalked out of the place, and directed his steps towards his lowly habitation.

Meantime the miscreant Enriquez had arrived at the mansion of the countess, in high hopes of seeing all his apprehensions removed, and the field again open for his calculating villany. He hurried to his chamber, and there began to hold busy converse with his thoughts. His insolence and presumption were equal to his depravity of character. The idea of becoming the husband of the countess, and by that means obtaining possession of her estates, had taken strong hold of his mind. That he should have extraordinary obstacles to overcome, he did not doubt. The pride of the countess, and her invincible aversion for him, threw fearful impediments in his way; but, on the other hand, he flattered himself with the idea that the same pride which would scorn him as a partner for life, would make her fear him as the possessor of a dreadful secret, the divulging of which would ruin her for ever. It was upon this circumstance that the miscreant built all his hopes, and, extravagant as his preten-

sions may appear, he did not by any means despair of them ultimately prosper. He had other plans for his conduct, the maturing of which would depend on the success of his present schemes. Enriquez had fiercely plunged the career of guilt, and having once shut his heart against every whisper of remorse, he determined to follow his criminal views with desperate and unwavering resolution. As a criminal by halves he despised, and he certainly did not mean to bring this sort of contempt upon himself. The few qualities with which nature had endowed him having been misapplied, Enriquez considered them only as means of serving his criminal schemes. He was not moved by the enormity of his guilt, nor carried away by any炽烈的 zeal or fanaticism towards the commission of crime. Nor could he plead ignorance or apathy of feeling in relation to them.

No, he was a cold, systematic villain, one who calculated with nice precision the advantages and disadvantages of every step he advanced in his career. The unprofitableness of his plan, when once ascertained, would make him abandon it, but he would never be deterred by its probable difficulties, its perilous nature, or its atrocity. Having arranged in his mind what his future line of conduct should be, he lay himself upon his bed and slept—slept, perhaps, while innocence and worth were kept awake by suffering and fortune.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

VERDEFLOL was not long in meeting again with his old friend Carlos. The moment he saw him, he addressed him in his usual frank and reckless manner. Carlos had the time hastening to his house, when he heard his name called by his name. He turned round, and, with feelings of indignation, perceived that he was accosted by his old friend in as cordial a manner as if nothing at all had occurred between them.

" Well, sir," he said, sternly, " what means this intrusion ? I have nothing further to say to you, and all communication between us must henceforth come through the medium of a third person."

" But I don't see the necessity of a third person," returned Verdeflor, calmly ; " two are sufficient in this case."

" Sir, I repeat that I will bear your raillery no more, and that any further encroachment upon my time will only be considered an additional offence."

" Carlos, in the name of Heaven, will you hear me ?" cried Verdeflor, with more earnestness than was habitual to him ; " there must be some strange misunderstanding in this business, and the mistake cannot at all be mended, unless you show yourself as willing as I am to discuss the matter calmly. As I am a man of honour, I again repeat that I am not conscious of having intentionally offended you. My affection for you, and the favours you have done me, lead me to desire an amicable adjustment of this affair, for I can assure you, my good fellow, that I would not have borne from any one else the harsh words which you have so unsparingly dealt out."

" Were they not deserved, sir ?" demanded Carlos, in an indignant tone.

" No, by my honour they were not," returned his friend, eagerly ; " and if you will but explain the matter coolly, as no reasonable man would refuse, you will soon be convinced that it is you, not I, who ought to be considered the aggressor in this case."

There was in the whole manner of Verdeflor something so indicative of sincerity as to moderate his friend's resentment. He therefore resolved to afford Verdeflor an opportunity of vindicating his conduct, and as they were now near the banquero's dwelling, he observed, in an austere tone of voice,

" Well, sir—I will not deny your request, and shall be glad if you can clear yourself as fully as your words seem to imply. This is not however the proper place for a debate, and, if you have no objection, follow me up to my apartment."

" With great pleasure," answered Verdeflor, confidently.

They mounted the stairs, and in a few moments they were closeted in the room. Carlos stiffly and ceremoniously pointed to a chair, to which form of etiquette Verdeflor answered, with a smile,

"No, I'd rather stand. Really this seems to me like a dream." Then in a high tone he continued, "You say I am a treacherous friend, wanting in proper regard and gratitude to you; in short, that I have deeply and cruelly wronged you. These indeed are serious charges, and if you succeed in convicting me I shall appear a very despicable fellow; but I trust that no such thing will be made out."

"Words, mere words!" returned Carlos; "and however willing I may be to give them a favourable interpretation, they can establish no positive proof of the injustice of my accusation."

"Well, but my good sir," retorted Verdeflor, rather piqued, "you do not suppose I am endowed with the power of divination, for by such help alone could I dive into the matter. Let the charges be distinctly specified. Till the present moment you have done nothing but accuse me roundly of treachery and ingratitude; and as my word of honour seems insufficient to remove your grounds of complaint, pray enter into particulars. Your mere asserting that I am a traitor will not induce me to consider myself entitled to such odious appellation, until you name and prove the precise charge."

"You will not deny that you have been at Aranjuez?"

"To be sure not; why should I?"

"That you went there in a clandestine manner for a secret transaction?"

"Hold there; I don't admit the premises. I went to Aranjuez, not clandestinely, but openly, as is always my way; and with regard to a secret transaction, I am not conscious of any, unless you call such, a project of marriage between me and a girl of whom I knew no more than I knew of the Emperor of China."

Carlos began to pant for breath; his emotion increased by degrees, until it broke out in the following exclamation—

"He has the boldness to confess it to my face!"

"Ay, to your face or to the face of any one else," retorted Verdeflor. "Why I don't suppose I am obliged to ask your permission to marry—am I! Good Heavens! I never heard any thing like that—I suppose for the future I must neither eat, drink, play, mount a horse, or court a woman, without previously obtaining your gracious consent and approbation?"

"Sir," retorted Carlos, fiercely, "you may do every thing

you have enumerated but the last ; for no one but a villain —yes, I say the word broadly—no one but a villain would endeavour to supplant his friend, by offering courtship to the woman that friend loves."

" Well, that I allow too," coolly observed Verdeflor, " but I don't see how this can be applied to the present case."

" You must know then, sir, if you can be really ignorant of the circumstance, that the young lady to whom you have presumed to pay your addresses, is one whose affections have been previously engaged—"

" Now, Carlos, will you explain—"

" There is no need of any more explanation. What I have said is enough to show that I am deeply and personally interested in the fate of the young lady."

" Upon my honour, Carlos," exclaimed Verdeflor, " so after all the murder is out. Well, I give you joy, for she is a most beautiful girl, and seems a good girl too. But what a sly dog you have been all this while. So you have kept this affair a close secret from your friend—from such a friend too ; the most kind, prudent, serviceable of all friends, past, present, and to come."

The strange manner of Verdeflor made Carlos pause. He could not reconcile the supposed treachery of his friend with his present words, which bore the stamp of sincerity. On the other hand, how could he discard from his mind the statement which his own father had made of the affair ? In this state of suspense, he waited for Verdeflor to throw more light upon the matter. Verdeflor was happily as ready on his side to give the information required, and continued—

" Yes, my good Carlos, I must say that you have treated me shamefully. Such want of confidence was unpardonable, and besides, see what a world of mischief it might have produced. However 'tis well it is not worse, and you may rest tranquil that you possess the entire affections of this Angelica, if my knowledge of the sex does not wofully deceive me."

Carlos seemed now preparing his face to look very foolish ; but before the preparations were quite completed, he ventured to say, though in an uncertain tone,

" Then I perceive that you are not married ?"

" Married !" exclaimed Verdeflor, with a sudden start, " who the devil has put that into your head ? Alas ! poor boy, I see that some one has imposed on your credulity. Nay, I would swear by my honour, some fine new scheme

of your most diplomatic father. By-the-by he is, a most clumsy negotiator. How much do you think he was to give me for taking the desperate step of marrying?"

"Good Heavens! I hope you don't sell yourself in this manner."

"Sell! no, no, my good fellow; do not call it by so hard a name; but I will tell you the whole of the story, for I now begin to perceive clearly the whole plan of operations, as arranged between the politic Countess of Belprado and your kind papa, the *Tesorero-general* that is to be. They have always been anxious to see you united to Paulita. I myself saw no harm in that. It is a most rational wish to long for a very rich son-in-law, and it is equally natural and pardonable in a very rich *banquero* to long for a lady of rank as his daughter-in-law; still more so, if to this circumstance be added another most furious longing,—that of becoming a *Tesorero-general*. Perceiving the reasonableness of these desires, I thought no harm of coalescing with the parties, though, by-the-by, I must observe, I made a great sacrifice for your welfare, since I must confess that I feel a sort of a partiality for Paulita myself. With regard to the orphan, I was totally ignorant even of her existence, until your señor padre came one fine morning to cajole me into the matrimonial noose. Of course I did not then perceive that you were at all concerned in this affair, for your apparent disinclination to accept Paulita's hand might arise from any other cause as well as this. Your papa played his card very dexterously, for he never acquainted me with the true merits of the case. He offered me a very handsome remuneration for the sacrifice of my liberty at the altar of Hymen. This, of course, being a prudent, philosophical young man, and having besides a sort of conscientious feeling for the good of my creditors, I did not think proper to reject. Besides, my heart not being at that moment particularly engaged, I thought it perfectly correct that one lady should obtain the advantages of my hand as well as another. Papa and I went down to Aranjuez, a beautiful spot, as you must certainly know from your frequent visits. In that beautiful spot, I saw your equally beautiful mistress, under the surveillance of your aunt, not quite so beautiful, and tormented no doubt with frequent visits from a parcel of *beatas*, decidedly ugly. As I am a remarkably shrewd fellow, I saw at the first glimpse of Theresa (I believe that is her name!) how the

= case stood. She was an intended victim ; but I did not think the duties of a sacrificator quite consistent with my tastes. What do you think I did ? Why, I immediately rejected the beautiful creature's hand. But mind, you owe me no thanks for that, for as I have already told you I never suspected that you were at all interested in my refusal—so she afterward told me, or rather I guessed it."

We have above stated that Carlos was preparing himself to look foolish ; we must now add, that every preparation was made by this time, and the effect surpassed all reasonable expectation. Some malignant star had decreed that every member of the Cabezon family should, some time or other, be doomed to undergo this unpleasant dilemma, for we must allow that the operation of looking foolish is any thing but agreeable. So Carlos thought at the present moment, and he seemed fully alive to the miseries of his situation. When these luckless discoveries are once made, another discovery equally awkward follows, and that is the obligation of confessing one's self an ass, and making a suitable apology for one's pains. Again, the task of apologizing is one of the most difficult to human genius in the world. It is really astonishing how the most lively imaginations and sound judgments are teased, perplexed, and put to the torture in composing an apology agreeable to both sides. And this, we suppose, is the reason of the comparative failures of such sort of things, even when executed by those persons who have shown immense powers of eloquence in the former part of the transaction, viz., that of giving offence. Carlos pondered for a while, and then began his confession in the following manner :

"Verdeflor," he muttered, in a confused tone, "I have made a great fool of myself."

"Certainly you have," coolly replied the other.

"You are a good, kind, generous fellow."

"I know I am."

"And I owe you a thousand apologies for my rude and unjust behaviour towards you."

"Very well, I accept them, and since you confess your sins, I readily give you absolution ; but take care you do so no more ; and now let us see in what I can be of service to you."

"Upon my honour," answered Carlos, in confusion, "you are really a good friend."

"I have often told you so, but you would never believe me. The want of faith in rich young men, concerning the affections of their poorer companions, is really frightful ; but let us say no more about it. I am afraid that all my remonstrances and arguments cannot correct this sort of skepticism."

"My good Verdeflor, you may rest assured I shall never more distrust your friendship and honour, and I am very sorry for what has happened."

"Well, well, don't distress yourself too much," replied his friend, smiling gayly, "such things are of continual occurrence ; and, besides, I have always found that it is your sober, discreet, sensible man who makes the most egregious fool of himself, when he has once got a wrong notion into his head. And now, by-the-by, unless you have something else to command, I think I had better go and thank your father for having kindly procured me a chance of being run through the body, or having my brains blown out—a dreadful catastrophe, if we take into consideration the quality of such brains."

"My dear Verdeflor, you had better let matters rest as they are at present, for I am apprehensive that my father, as soon as he finds that his plans are deranged, will take immediate measures to remove Theresa for ever from my sight."

"Hold, Carlos," returned his friend, "I have already acquainted your father with my resolves, and if you really apprehend any violence on his part, you had better try to prevent it without loss of time. Now what shall I do for you ? Do you wish me to go and deliver that enchanted princess from the power of her enchanters, or shall we go and take her away *vi et armis*?—Stratagem or force—decide. I am equally ready for one thing or the other. We may either capitulate with the besieged, or take the fortress by storm, just as you like. I have been very idle of late, and I want some occupation. I think it will suit me admirably."

"You are obliging, Verdeflor, and I shall certainly request your services when the time comes. I shall first have another and last interview with my father on this subject, and should he still persevere in his opposition, I shall then venture upon such steps as my situation may require."

"Very well ; and now, Carlos, I suppose I may go and

mind my business without the danger of being again called a traitor."

After this reconciliation the two friends separated with increased sentiments of regard and esteem. The *amantium iræ amoris integratio est*, applies as well to friendship as to love, and we would advise friends, when they have been for a long time on quiet good terms, just to have a bit of an affray, and set about breaking one another's heads, that they may afterward love each other the more. A duel, for example, is one of the very best improvements of friendship. It is really astonishing what a tender affection a man feels towards another who has conferred upon him the benefit of a bullet, or a thrust of a sword. It is deeply to be regretted that this expedient is shut out by custom from the fair sex, for could it be more generally extended, there is but little doubt that the stock of affection and good will circulating among mankind would be greatly increased.

Verdeflor, upon quitting his friend, felt a very powerful temptation to invade the *banquero's* privacy for the charitable purpose of giving him a lecture. It was but fair that the philosopher, who had so many at command, for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, should in turn be indulged with similar favours. The talents of Verdeflor in this line, though not to be compared in solemnity to the *banquero's*, were yet not despicable in the vituperative style. The young man, however, vanquished this terrible temptation of abusing his friend's papa, and resolved to take no notice of the affair until the proper time. Happily for the good resolutions of Verdeflor, the multiplicity and variety of his pursuits afforded him ample means of keeping them uninfringed. What with playing at billiards, haunting coffee-houses, galloping furiously, visiting the Marchioness of Montechico and other ladies, giving dismissals to his old tradesmen, and taking measures to increase his debts, he found occupation enough to drive away all thoughts of the *banquero*, his son, Theresa, and the whole pious conclave of Aranjuez. Besides his usual round of employment he had now another object that had taken strong hold of his mind, and that was to learn what could possibly be the matter with his friend Cortante, whose mysterious conduct gave room to suspect that he was implicated in the revolution which had just exploded. We must, however, leave him for the present, and turn to other matters which demand immediate notice.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RUPTURE.

THE anxiously expected event at length took place. In the month of March, 1820, the oath to the constitution was taken, and a change of government followed. Madrid was in a great ferment, and every one seemed more or less affected by the change. Don Marcos Cabezon was of course deeply concerned in passing events. It is a common saying that misfortunes never come alone, and though the maxim be a common one, we must make room for it in this book, as no less a personage than the *banquero* affords an example of its truth. It has already been seen that his hopes of beholding his son married to Paulita, by means of Verdeflor, had nearly vanished ; but he had yet more to bear. Despite of his sagacity he did not perceive, poor man, that the change of government would completely knock up the place of *Tesorero-general*. His next interview with the Countess of Belprado was exceedingly animated, and might be very amusing to unconcerned spectators, though not quite so much to the parties themselves. Don Marcos had drilled himself by two or three hours' preparation into a competent share of courage, in order to convey the disastrous intelligence of Verdeflor's apostacy to that lady. He had called to his aid all the rich stores of his eloquence, and had been extremely assiduous in arranging his thoughts and words, as well as his wise face, to the best advantage.

Yet all these precautions seemed of no avail when he found himself in the presence of the countess. Strange to say, his great courage oozed away, and his fine speeches stuck in his throat, spite of half a dozen vigorous helping hemns that preceded to clear the passage. Either the hemns did not perform their duty properly, or the passage must have been unusually encumbered ; but the truth is, that those speeches, in spite of the *banquero*'s wishes to make them advance, stuck fast, and would no further go. This was an

awful mishap to so great an orator, but it is a mishap to which great orators are, and must be, sometimes subject.

The Countess of Belprado looked steadfastly on the speechless Don Marcos, and from the solemnity of his face, as well as from the announcement of so many hemis, she surmised that something very important was trying to come.

"Well, Don Marcos," said she, abruptly, getting out of patience with the *banquero's* dumbness, "have you any thing disagreeable to communicate?"

Don Marcos put on a portentous face, and with a mighty exertion at length exclaimed,

"Can you believe me, countess, that fool, that puppy, has after all proved false?"

"What fool? what puppy?" inquired the countess, "whom do you mean, señor?"

"Heaven bless me! why, Verdeflor. After all his promises, the ridiculous coxcomb declares that he will not marry the orphan;—but he shall marry the orphan. Make yourself easy on that head—I have no notion of being laughed at in this manner."

"But your son, sir," interrupted the countess, "does he still seem disinclined to our arrangements? Speak plainly, Don Marcos. I will no longer endure this humiliation, for, by such a name I must call my long forbearance. Madrid is not so scantily provided with young men as to make a lady of rank and great accomplishments despair for the loss of your son."

These words were uttered in a haughty tone, which almost frightened the *banquero* out of his wits. He was conscious of the truth of the lady's assertion, and he therefore immediately applied himself to remove the bad impression which his intelligence had produced.

"My dear countess," he said, eagerly, "be not so hasty, you must make some allowances for the foolish and romantic notions of youth. My son is certainly a simpleton in not adoring, as he ought, the perfections of your daughter; but depend upon it, as soon as that provoking orphan is out of the way, every thing will proceed smoothly according to our desires. Now, countess, give me your opinion on this change of government. Think you that a new ministry will be nominated? for in such a case, who is to appoint me *Tesorero-general*? who assures me, that your influence with the new men in office will continue?"

"Don Marcos," interrupted the countess, sharply, "I am sorry to perceive such evident marks of egotism in you. Your advancement, it seems, is the only object that engrosses your attention. Such perfect selfishness is really offensive."

The *banquero* cast an ominous glance at this freedom of speech ; it was certainly highly indecorous and unjust in the countess to tax such a man as Don Marcos with selfishness ; a man who was exerting all his endeavours to serve the countess, her daughter, his son, Verdeflor, an orphan, and finally his country. But such is the ingratitude of man, and when we say man, we also mean woman, that the praiseworthy motives of action in the *banquero* were entirely misinterpreted, and as he had the nicest regard for justice, he quickly resented the affront.

"Señora," he said, very gravely and pompously, "I certainly see no cause why you should accuse me of selfishness. What have I done to deserve this foul imputation ?"

"Banquero, you must not take so high a tone with me," proudly returned the countess.

Don Marcos could contain himself no longer. The repeated tribulations which he had lately suffered, added to the arrogance of the countess, and the desperate prospect of his hopes, all combined to exhaust his patience, and make him again appear in his true colours, in that light which so ill becomes a philosopher. Don Marcos fell into a tremendous rage. As we have already favoured our readers with rather a picturesque description of the effects of passion in the *banquero*, we will not travel over the same ground again. Suffice it to say, that the countess was shocked and scandalized at his impropriety, and a very animated scene of sarcastic repartee ensued. Both began to accuse each other of the most sordid views, and so far from mincing the matter, no sort of control was placed over their language.

"It is all my fault," cried the countess, indignantly, "for countenancing the pretensions, and tolerating the arrogance of an ignorant man who pretends, upon the strength of his gold, to put himself upon the same footing with birth, rank, and education."

"If we come to that, señora," retorted Don Marcos, fiercely, "let me tell you, that however you may despise the man, you have always evinced a peculiar kindness for his money. Ay, I will not mince the matter, for I am not to

" be insulted with impunity by the first countess in the land.
" No,—by no means. I will not."

" Sir, you are growing insolent; I have done you too much honour in accepting your filthy gold."

" Bless my soul," cried Don Marcos, half laughing, and half in a rage, " that is always the way with great people, they are continually giving us to understand their contempt for filthy gold, and yet I am surprised they are not afraid to soil their delicate fingers with it. No, no, they care not how far they go on contaminating themselves; and let me tell you, countess, you have evinced as much courage as any I ever knew in braving the dangers of the infection."

" Sir, I shall trouble you to quit my house as soon as it is expedient."

" I will do it with the greatest pleasure, and I have only further to say, that I was a great fool in ever coming into it."

" I agree with you there," said the countess, as she bowed him out of the room.

We also agree with the lady. Thus it is clearly demonstrated that Don Marcos Cabezon[†] had been a fool; a very woful mischance for so great a *banquero*, and future *Tesorero-general*. The foregoing scene was short, pithy, and conclusive. The fire, though of short duration, was carried on very briskly, and each and all of our readers must by this time feel convinced, that they were as able to abuse as they had been formerly to compliment each other. They separated with mutual sentiments of rancour and indignation, and inwardly resolving to cherish such Christian feelings to the end of their lives. Don Marcos bounced out of the house in great agitation both of mind and body, and one must be really astonished how the man could support such repeated shocks of adversity. He must indeed have been endowed with peculiar strength of nerve and soul.

He now hurried along the streets half out of his senses, and arrived at his own mansion almost by a mechanical operation of instinct. The alarm of his servants was renewed. That very moment half of them were packed out of doors—a puppy, which he intended for a present to Paulita, was ordered to be thrown out of the window—the furniture underwent a second castigation, and, in fine, Don Marcos omitted none of the freaks by which he was accustomed to exhibit his choler. He had many reasons to regret

his acquaintance, and even intimacy with the Countess of Belprado. Notwithstanding the apparent cordiality with which he had been treated, a cordiality which to general observers would have appeared sincere, the unfortunate *banquero* had now got an idea into his head that it had been completely assumed, that it had been merely tolerated in high circles, and that all along the countess and her connexions had paid their friendly attentions only to his wealth.

We are surprised that so wise a man as Don Marcos Cabezon never suspected this before, and we are also surprised that he should find any thing but what was perfectly natural in such conduct. The abrupt and decisive character of his late interview gave a most distressing concussion to his nerves ; indeed for some time he really imagined he had been visited by a painful vision. But, alas ! it was too true, he had actually received a most unceremonious dismissal, or rather rejection, from that house towards the support of whose splendour he had mainly contributed. Besides, there was something so extremely unaccountable in the unexpected explosion that quite bewildered the judgment of Don Marcos. The storm had burst without any previous symptoms indicative of the approaching uproar. It had arrived at its crisis without allowing any progressive gusts and clouds to forewarn the sufferer, but had fallen upon the head of the astounded *banquero* with a precipitancy and fierceness that was quite astonishing.

What could have actuated the Countess of Belprado to conduct herself in so irrelevant a manner ? These surmises perplexed the ejected *banquero* not a little ; but if they afforded most painful sensations, the conclusions to which he was, after all his speculating, obliged to come, were still more distressing and appalling. The beautiful phantom of the *Tesorero-general* was diminishing and fading to the sight—his air-built castles of ennobling his family by alliance with rank, began to crumble into ruins—and, to add to his horror, to crush even the budding of a single hope, he perceived that a total change had taken place in the ministry, and that the influence of the countess in that quarter was completely destroyed. This was excessively mortifying to a man of the *banquero's* elevated character and patriotic feelings. He accordingly sorely lamented the effects of the present revolution—not so much for the said effects in them-

selves, as because they destroyed the foundation of all his expectations.

Don Marcos Cabezon, being a most judicious individual, would have been content to serve his country under any form of government ; he only aimed at bestowing upon Spain his valuable services, and this was indeed highly commendable, and very disinterested withal. And here, by-the-by, we must strenuously raise our voice in favour of those deserving and noble individuals who, by some strange anomaly in human nature, are continually ill used, and treated with the most unjustifiable rigour ; we mean those exemplary, self-denying, and philosophic personages denominated time-servers. In our opinion such persons are entitled to unqualified approbation rather than censure and ridicule, since, in changing principles as often as clothes, to amalgamate themselves with the powers that be, "they prove that, for the sake of preserving the means of serving the state, they smother their own prejudices and feelings, and that the love of country supersedes in them every other consideration. Devotedness to the public weal and philosophic abnegation can indeed go no further."

Sadly annoyed and mortified was the good Don Marcos Cabezon, that an opportunity had not offered itself of joining this devoted class. He felt his heart throb with a longing to do good to his country ; but, alas ! some strange fatality presided over all his plans and schemes, since, though they were conceived with profound skill, and matured with judgment, yet they always failed at the moment of execution. Witness the diplomatic transaction at Aranjuez relating to the marriage of the orphan,—witness, too, the indifferent effects produced by the great sums of money squandered in the pursuit of high connexions, and in that of a *Tesorero-general*. For let it be here clearly understood that Don Marcos had, under several delicate pretexts, bestowed considerable money on that aerial personage. The *banquero* indeed carried his zeal so far, that not only was he willing to serve his country, but had actually paid dearly for the privilege of doing so. Here was a noble enthusiasm and disinterestedness, and yet, after all, to be baffled in his endeavours ! Really, such waywardness of fate must afflict every sincere lover of justice. To so atrocious a calamity, what remedy could be applied ? None ; and certainly the only fine thing that the disappointed Don Marcos could do, after such provoking mishaps, was

either to throw himself into the river, or abandon the ungrateful world in disgust, and bury himself alive in a convent.

But Don Marcos followed neither of these courses, more, no doubt, from the impracticability of so doing at the time, than from a want of resolution and moral courage. The Manzanares, indeed, the only thing resembling a river near Madrid, instead of drowning him outright, would have only procured him the advantage of getting wet feet, and for so trifling a satisfaction it was not worth while to take the trouble of the leap. Then, with regard to convents, Don Marcos entertained no partiality for them, for several reasons, the most powerful of which was perhaps, because his brother, Don Deogracias, was so friendly to them. The *banquero*, being a man of strong mind and clear judgment, must have perceived that a thing which a fool like his brother could admire, ought not to be admired by him, who was a person of a very different stamp.

We will not positively assert that Don Marcos Cabezon had in contemplation the idea of drowning himself or becoming a friar; we merely point out the possibility of such speculations. But that he would have made a very creditable friar, as far as external appearance was concerned, we can have no doubt; the capacious dimensions of his scull, the rotundity of his bodily frame, and the peculiar character of all his movements, would not have disgraced a cowl, or the rest of the conventional proprieties.

This, however, is a digression, irrelevant perhaps, as digressions generally are, though partly to be excused, as it tends to illustrate another of the many valuable qualities of Don Marcos Cabezon, who was equally competent to fill the post of *Tesorero-general*, or that of a reverend father.

CHAPTER XX.

EXPLANATIONS.

Now as we are going to inflict a few pages of explanations, we think ourselves bound in conscience to give fair notice to our readers, that they may very neatly skip them

ever. After this warning we wash our hands of all the tediousness which may accrue to them from their curiosity, and they shall have no business to complain of want of honourable dealing on our part.

The strange and sudden change of the Countess of Bel-prado in her conduct towards the *banquero*, may perchance have puzzled some readers as much as it did that ill-used individual himself. But the countess always entertained for Don Marcos Cabezon, and indeed all the Cabezons in Spain, a most sovereign contempt—the peculiar situation in which he was placed alone could have induced her to tolerate the tedious company and impertinences of a vulgar man without birth or education, and burthened besides with more than a reasonable stock of ignorance and self-sufficiency.

The difficulties occasioned by her splendid manner of living, and still more by the horrible fatality that compelled her to subscribe to the unjust and avaricious demands of the villain Enriquez, had made her pride condescend even to seek an alliance with people she inwardly despised. Accordingly, as long as a fair probability of the fulfilment of these plans existed, she had patiently endured the society of the *banquero*. Nay, she had prudently begun by imperceptible degrees to bring him forward into her circle, not to shock too cruelly her friends by the sudden presentation of so obnoxious a brother-in-law. In this she had partially succeeded, for besides the power of her *dictum* in such matters, her authority was most efficiently seconded by the *banquero's* great wealth. By this means Don Marcos had acquired, if not a firm footing in high society, at least a temporary admittance, which would no doubt be strengthened into a permanency by the projected union and by additional doses of gold; for such an inestimable privilege as that of moving in high society ought to be paid for, as well as every thing else in the world. The countess flattered herself that the opposition exhibited by Don Carlos towards the marriage would ultimately be removed; and besides, she never knew the whole extent of his aversion to the match, for the cautious father took good care to keep her in ignorance of certain things, as much as it lay in his power.

The post of *Tesorero-general* had been freely promised to Don Marcos, but whatever the influence of the countess might be to enable her to make such promises, it is no less certain that her power was completely overthrown by the

change of government. She at once despaired of obtaining the anxiously expected post, for upon the death of the incumbent, a new minister was provided without loss of time. This circumstance perplexed the countess, but her dilemma was considerably heightened when she received an anonymous letter, desiring her in a commanding tone not to persist in her schemes, since the affections of Don Carlos were irretrievably bestowed on another, and a union between him and Paulita could never be effected. At this interesting period, some d—d good natured friend of the countess very kindly and very clandestinely poured into her ear some dreadfully nauseous information, which pretended to prove that the *banquero's* affairs were not in so flourishing a state as it was generally believed; that at least one half of his wealth existed only in idea, and that of the other half, a considerable share had been lavishly squandered away in the grave follies of the vain, pompous man. This intelligence of course made the countess open wide her eyes, and awoke in her prudent mind many salutary reflections. She was certainly bound in duty to consult the interests of her daughter. Don Marcos was now not quite so desirable an object for a father-in-law. The countess discovered instantaneously a number of faults and imperfections in the man, which it was really surprising had escaped her acute observation before.

But the fact is that there exists a strange feeling in man, by the agency of which his bad qualities increase in proportion as his riches diminish. All along the Countess of Belprado had good-naturedly resolved to have a fool for a relative, and in this the condescending affability of the lady is highly to be extolled. It is certainly a token of great forbearance to put up with the infirmities of our neighbours; but when those infirmities pass certain bounds, no one can in conscience be expected to continue his charitable toleration. This was precisely the case with the provident countess. She considered it particularly impertinent in a man whom she deemed of low origin, to have pretensions to be allied to her, when she discovered that he only possessed half of the supposed wealth.

These considerations operated strongly on her mind, but there was another and perhaps more momentous speculation that had decided the countess in adopting the strange line of conduct above noted with regard to Don Marcos.

The insolence of the miscreant Enriquez had exhausted

her patience. The feeling of remorse with which she was tormented was daily becoming more poignant, but there was mixed with that dreadful sensation another, more noble and more fit for a delinquent than the mere canker arising from offence. The countess felt that the present state of her mind was essentially altered from what it had been. Pride did not rule so absolutely, and the threats of Enriquez had begun to lose a part of their appalling power. That same pride which made her feel the scorching shame arising from the bare idea of a humiliating discovery, now directed the channel of her thoughts to a more salutary course.

She had determined no longer to comply with the tyrannic and exorbitant extortions of Enriquez, but resolved to shake off and brave the thraldom in which she was held by that miscreant. Nay, she had determined to treat his menaces with scorn, and to be prepared to meet the most frightful results, rather than remain in her present humiliating state.

The night preceding she had been startled in her sleep by a fearful vision ; her daughter had heard her bitter mournful cries, and in the morning the unfortunate lady appeared greatly agitated and distressed from the effects of the dream. That morning she desired to be left alone ; and it was no doubt in this solitude, communing with her thoughts and feelings, that the present state of her mind had originated. The projected union with the *banquero's* son had now lost its seductive influence ; a new train of thoughts rose in her mind. She however did not quite resolve to break with Don Marcos. She determined to receive him with politeness, and wait till he should give some ground of offence for the premeditated storm to burst.

Unfortunately Don Marcos Cabezon was not an immaculate creature ; and, despite of his many other brilliant qualities, did not possess that of guessing what passes in another's mind without some hint to aid his reflections. Had he known beforehand that the great lady had taken a fancy to quarrel with him, he might perhaps have been more guarded in his expressions, in order to prevent so calamitous a consummation. The countess, as we have seen, received the *banquero* with her usual politeness, and for some time continued the conversation as if no alteration whatever had occurred in her former views. This show of cordiality was soon exchanged for a very different display. When a person

has a mind to quarrel, nothing is so easy in nature as to find a pretext. Don Marcos was not long in affording the desired cue. For all this, our reader may wonder at the very summary and cavalier manner in which the rupture has been conducted ; but let me tell such readers, that this is the very best way in the world of disposing of such matters.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PIUS COTERIE.

WHAT in nature can be more awful and affecting, than to see half a dozen female faces in deep sorrow ? Such a distressing sight it is now my painful duty to recount. But the distress and dismay of the said sight were double in the present case, for the half dozen female faces were not, alas ! composed of the fairest portion of the feminine sex. Grief oftentimes, instead of detracting, adds to the loveliness and charm of a fair mourner ; but it produces a very different effect upon those sorrowful beings, who are not fair, but rather what one calls very plain, and whom the less moderate part of the community denominate ugly.

The *beatas* of Aranjuez, despite of the numerous perfections and virtues which distinguished their persons, were yet wanting, as it has already been repeated, in the attractions bestowed by youth and beauty. This was certainly no fault of theirs : the first imperfection arose from a miscalculation of nature, in having made them two or three score years too soon ; and with regard to the second, it is almost certain, that had they been consulted at all concerning the form in which they chose to appear in the world, they would certainly have hinted at the desirableness of being endowed with as many charms as fell to the share of Venus, or Helen, or any other celebrated beauty : though, by-the-by, I am here perhaps committing a gross mistake, for the good *beatas*, being orthodox Christians, might never have had any such profane thoughts and desires. However, I think I have ably enough advocated the cause of the *beatas* of Aranjuez, and I sincerely trust that no man, or woman either, with a moderate

hare of sense, and two grains of generosity, will be tempted to mock and ridicule the very ugly grimaces now in the process of exhibiting by the devout dames.

The congregation had assembled sooner than usual ; the chocolate-sipping hour had not yet chimed, nor indeed had the good Doña Tecla issued out any particular invitation for the pious coterie to assemble. From this circumstance the shrewd reader may easily suspect that some very momentous affair had occurred to call for this solicitude. Indeed the town of Aranjuez was by no means destitute of events to awake the excitement of busy people, and without going further for causes to produce such effects, the beatitudinal circle itself was sufficient to bring forth matter for speculation and alarm. Doña Petrona, Doña Feliciana, and the rest of the dames being kindly exempt in right of their character, from applying themselves to any business of their own, were most conveniently at leisure to attend to the affairs of every body else. They had certainly to count their beads, and mumble sundry orisons to those particular saints whom they patronised ; but even allowing for the time spent in those pious exercises, and taking also into consideration that allowed to masses, confession, *novenas*, and religious gossip with reverend friars, they had still sufficient of the day upon their hands to watch and regulate the business of their neighbours.

To this task indeed, they applied themselves with wondrous alacrity and exemplary self-devotedness. It is really a matter of astonishment, how some good folks, especially of the female gender, will feel solicitous for the welfare of their fellow-creatures. They evince perhaps more interest in the concerns of their acquaintance than in their own—and this highly commendable feeling cannot certainly be too much extolled. The *beatas* of Aranjuez would in this respect vie with any other sisters of their calling throughout Spain, and when we venture so rash a statement, we are aware of the enormous responsibility which is attached to it. The Spanish soil is indeed peculiarly favourable to the growth of such valuable plants, and I am sensible of the proper indignation that will be felt by the *beatas* of various other cities, towns, and villages, when they come to know the preference awarded to the sisterhood of Aranjuez. But every man has his partialities, and I own that mine are strongly interested for the pious dames of this place. No one perhaps ever

exhibited more research and extensive knowledge in learning the whole particulars of a sinner's fall and conversion than Doña Petrona. No one was ever more ready to offer good counsel to parents, how to educate their children, than Doña Feliciana. These kind creatures, together with the rest of the set, went on daily prying into every secret, and putting their nose into every corner. No father could choose a trade for his son without the interposition of the devout counsellors, and there was no marriage celebrated in the place in which they had not been excessively busy, either *pro or con*, though the latter was more often the case.

Besides this, it was a duty which the dames had gratuitously imposed upon themselves, to watch the conduct of every unmarried woman, from the age of fourteen upwards, and the watch was doubly active if she happened to be pretty. Then they kindly took upon themselves to sermonize, scold, and pull little children by the ears, besides teaching them prayers, and affording them very luminous ideas concerning the devil, and the terrible tricks the mischievous fiend was continually practising to entrap the unwary and carry them below. On the things passing in the Tartarean regions they possessed most extensive, and no doubt correct information. They could tell, one by one, all the torments which were inflicted on the poor wretches who chanced to go there ; and would have been able, if required, to make a just computation of the quantity of oil, pitch, and brimstone daily consumed in the frying, roasting, and various other operations carried on in that great manufactory of torments. Their knowledge in the natural history of the place was also wonderful ; they were perfectly acquainted with the innumerable classes of serpents, gorgons, and other monsters employed there, as well as the nature of their functions. They could describe most minutely their loathsome and frightful appearance quite as correctly as if they had seen them.

With such a stock of learning, it is not to be wondered at if the female sages now and then rather imperiously arrogated to themselves the right of dictating and threatening impenitent people in their own houses. For stubborn folks there existed, even at Aranjuez, who sometimes refused to pay a just deference to the zeal and wisdom of the dames ; and indeed their insolence was often carried so far, that they followed quite a different course from the one pointed out by

the volunteer advisers. The *beatas* could not in conscience endure to see things going wrong. It was then their duty to interpose—they knew better than parents what was good for their children ; they also knew what a patient should do in his illness, and to what saint he should address himself in such and such a disease—for the *beatas* were thoroughly acquainted with the particular holy medicines that presided over each variety of sickness. But the most usual source of contention arose from the culpable negligence of farmers and other ignorant people, in their remittances towards defraying the expenses of pious works.

Money affairs have been time out of date the cause of much mischief and misunderstanding in the world, and strange to say, even in the more pious portion of the community. Those worthy personages, whose thoughts are elevated from sublunary things to more unearthly speculations, have now and then felt the disagreeable debates arising therefrom. Doña Petrona would sometimes explain to a sensual man, upon a fortunate windfall, the propriety of putting aside part of this unexpected wealth for souls in purgatory—and if the sensual man happened not to be convinced by the strong arguments of the monitor, much scandal would of necessity follow, his barbarity towards the helpless beings would be severely reprobated, and of course a great stir and clamour made against him.

Then Doña Feliciana was very assiduous in another branch of their vocation, that of procuring new suits of clothes for their favourite saints upon their festivals, as well as wax candles to burn for their honour. Now and then a sad altercation ensued between the pious agent and those who were rather backward in contributing to the toilet and illumination of the saint. Doña Nicolasa would feel sorely annoyed if such and such sermons had not been committed to their favourite preacher, or if a luckless man chanced upon his death to leave more masses for the friars of some distant convent than to those of their own town ; but it would be a tedious, indeed an interminable task, to describe the various pursuits of the *beatas*, and the different troubles and disappointments encountered in their fulfilment. Suffice it to say, that the avocations of a *beata* are of the most multitudinous description, and only to be satisfactorily discharged by beings, who, as we have already stated, added to an uncommon zeal and

assiduity, the quality of abstracting their thoughts from their own concerns to manage those of their neighbours.

In fact they had the *surveillance* of the place ; they were the instructors, monitors, and spiritual sentinels of Aranjuez. They were, besides, the collectors of pious donations, whether in specie, wax, &c. *id est*, the minor tax-gatherers of convents, churches, and chapels ; they were moreover a sort of select police set to watch over the imperfections and sins of the frail sex, and the castigators of unruly and naughty children ; they constituted too a select committee, who could most appropriately discuss things concerning their eternal welfare and the various merits of chocolate. They were the volunteer inspectors of their friends' houses, and would gratuitously bestow their notions on every thing contained therein, from the regulating of the inmates' souls to that of their kitchens. They were besides—but softly, where does an indiscreet zeal lead me ? I quite forget the assertion which I made some twenty-three lines above. Here I must stop, and leave the rest of a *beata's* duties to be imagined, for I am sure more than enough has already been said to prove their immense utility in a nation.

Some sly reader will by this time be saying to himself that we have wandered prodigiously from the subject indicated at the beginning of the chapter. But we shall take the liberty of informing the said sly one, that we have all along divined his thoughts, and that he is quite mistaken in his surmises. It is true that the chapter very awfully began with some highly edifying reflections on female sorrow, followed by equally wise observations on the peculiarities attending the exhibition of grief on certain faces. By a natural consequence, the *beatas* of Aranjuez were introduced as possessing an undisputed claim to those certain faces. Then it followed, of course, that an explanation of the causes of the said woful display was expected ; but instead of affording the expected information, we very sagaciously kept it in the background, at the same time boldly launching into a panegyrical description of those devout dames. Now we think this a very dexterous contrivance, for by bringing before our readers their several and extraordinary titles to public regard, it stands to reason that every one will feel doubly interested in their sorrow, and every one will also feel doubly anxious to come to the knowledge of the distressing circumstance that called it forth.

"We make no doubt that the sympathy and curiosity of our readers are by this time excited to a very high degree, and that we may now venture to enter upon the interesting topic without further preparation. So important an event, however, as the grief of half a dozen *beatas* requires to be treated in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It is a most melancholy event," quoth Doña Petrona, putting on one of her most sedate looks. "Heaven only knows what may befall the unfortunate maiden, exposed as she will be to all the snares of this sinful world."

"Who could have expected it?" observed Doña Felicia.

"No one, certainly," returned Doña Tecla, "she had resolutely made up her mind to follow the pious callings of Heaven when this misfortune happened."

"Alas! for the poor orphan!" cried Doña Petrona.

"Our Lady protect her!" chanted forth Doña Nicolasa.

"Amen!" responded the devout conclave in unison.

The good dames had, indeed, been disappointed in their most grateful expectations. As they had the welfare of souls constantly in view, they could not support the bare idea of seeing one whom they had kindly condescended to put in the straight road to heaven, diverge to the crooked one of the world.

After the strange interview between Theresa and Veredolor, the former had again expressed her readiness to follow the wishes of the *beatas*, and thus regained their forfeited regard. Willing to improve the good disposition of the orphan, they determined to employ more than their usual activity, that the project might not miscarry a second time.

Padre Caledonio and Padre Sinfioriano, together with other auxiliary padres, were true to their post. They preached copiously, while the *beatas* teased still more efficiently. By dint of both, Theresa was brought to promise

to enter her novitiate as soon as things could be made ready for the occasion.

This promise was very graciously received, and it is surprising the prodigious number of endearing names which the nun that was to be obtained by this behaviour. Indeed no fortunate lover, on the day which his adored mistress promised to become his, was ever more lavish of tender and grateful epithets than were these pious dames. With the exception of the profane appellations of angels, and idols, and others of the same kind, rather too freely used by lovers, to the great scandal of all good Christians, the whole vocabulary of affection was exhausted in behalf of the girl only a few days before so severely persecuted by the zealous devotees. Her love for Carlos was utterly forgotten. She was no longer an indiscreet, vain, coquettish maiden, and they gave up deplored the fate of the little innocent that they so charitably insinuated was about to come into the world.

This really must have been a source of great consolation to the immaculate dames who were at once so solicitous for the souls of pretty women and the fate of little innocents. To encourage the orphan to persevere in her good resolution, her sapient monitors descended at great length on all spiritual comforts, to which others were added which were not quite of so ethereal a nature. She was made to hope that, in process of time, she might become lady abbess of the convent, which would certainly be a very high honour, especially when the obscurity of her origin was considered. She was next initiated into the arcana of the conventional life, the sundry little niceties there enjoyed, &c. &c. Strange, that the good dames never thought it worth while to put themselves in the way of such enjoyments, but the fact is, that they were excessively disinterested, and that they forgot their own happiness for the sake of other more frail mortals, for the regulating of whose souls it was necessary they should continue in the world.

Of these very politic speculations it was deemed expedient to keep the *banquero* in blessed ignorance. Doña Tecla, despite of her abundant zeal for the future welfare of the orphan's soul, as well as her earnest anxiety to keep on good terms with her devout friends, felt still a strange sensation of alarm at the idea of having again to encounter the ominous looks of her magnificent brother. Every one

shows, by this time, that Don Marcos looked peculiarly awful when he was in the sulks, and the timid temper of his sister naturally recoiled from the dreaded sight. An inviolable secrecy was therefore preserved concerning the whole affair, and considering there were no less than half a dozen female tongues intrusted with the *deposite*, it is indeed marvellous that (but softly, no idle reflections)—women can keep a secret, when it serves their purpose, equally as well as man, and indeed I might here present many a striking illustration of this truth, if I only dared.

These proceedings were carried on at Aranjuez while Don Marcos was foaming and panting with rage and vexation at Madrid. The day for the orphan's reception at the convent was settled, and the eve of it at length arrived. This was indeed one of great rejoicing at Doña Tecla's mansion. A feast suitable to the occasion was prepared—a fresh supply of the very best chocolate, Malaga wine, and preserves, was made. Sweetmeats came from Madrid—a turkey suffered death—and, in fine, every thing was in a bustle of preparation—each female member of the pious fraternity had arrayed herself in her best attire, and the smartest rosary was displayed on the occasion.

With regard to the padres, they showed their most capacious and richest snuffboxes, the crowns of their heads were shaven with unusual care, and much attention was bestowed even upon the outward appearance.

Early in the morning they began to congregate, but not until all the *coterie* had auspiciously entered upon the day by an extra mass. Soon after, most liberal donations of wax candles were collected, and it was then that the partialities of each *beata* came conspicuously to light. One was a patroness of the Virgin of Atocha. Another of that of the Conception, or the Mercies, &c. &c. One *beata* took St. Joseph under her protection, another St. John, but there was no unholy rivalry exhibited, the candles were sent in perfect good harmony to the respective chapel of each saint, and there burnt in honour of the solemnity of the morning.

Doña Tecla was more than ordinarily munificent upon this occasion. She was not content with going to the expense incurred by the entertainment of the day and the money applied for pious and charitable purposes, but besides a copious dinner prepared for the poor beggars of the place, and a gift in money, she presented, moreover, the reverend

padres with sundry tokens of esteem, such as handkerchiefs, good snuff, and the like. All these things together put the pious assemblage in marvellous good humour.

One o'clock struck, and with it dinner was announced. This necessarily augmented the placidity and even jocularity of the friars' and *beatas'* tempers. With the idea of a good dinner many grateful associations are connected, and it is meet that a proper estimate should be set upon so important a branch of the animal functions. I believe Padre Caledonio and Padre Sinsforiano were not wanting in proper respect for such an occasion. To their honour be it said, that among their multifarious information they had a competent knowledge of the component merits of a dinner. The important moment arrived, and Doña Tecla called upon the eldest padre of the party to say grace. After this preliminary they all set to with wonderful alacrity, and a prodigious clatter of spoons followed. I am not sure, but I think that Padre Caledonio, in direct opposition to the established rules of good breeding, took soup three times. There was very little talking at first, a practice not lightly to be commended, for it is really silly to be losing time in words when it can be much more profitably occupied. Padre Sinsforiano had a just notion of the value of time, and accordingly had already made up his mind to lose as little as he possibly could. A brisk, incessant, resolute masticatory movement was now perceived—the male part of the assembly of course showed more ability in the performance of this task. Padre Sinsforiano performed to admiration. The female portion of the meeting were highly edified and taken up in beholding his feats.

There was, too, a young friar who, considering his age, gave fair promise of rivalling Padre Sinsforiano. His scull was of the most appalling dimensions; seldom indeed has so capacious a tenement for brains been allotted to man, and if the whole of it had been stocked with the said commodity, no doubt the *beatas* would have been tempted to pronounce him a Solomon, an angel of light, a St. Augustin, &c.; but nature had kindly provided against this alarming danger.

The high repute of the other padres would suffer considerably from the vicinity of such superabundance of brains. This would have been productive of much misunderstanding and confusion among the conclave, which was moderate in all things save in piety, and if the intellectual inundation

flowed like a torrent upon them, all tranquillity would have been at an end ; to prevent this catastrophe, nature had cautiously withdrawn every particle of the ingredients of the said inundation from the ponderous scull of Father Francisco.

When the first powerful calls of a good appetite had been amply answered, and when Father Caledonio, unquestionably the best bibber of the set, had discussed a couple of bottles of Valdepeñas, there were a few symptoms that they, the reverend guests, had not lost their tongues. First there were some indistinct growls, which one might take either for a prayer or a sort of unfinished approbation of the eatables,—shortly after, the conversation burst forth with great spirit and animation. The rubicund visages of the good fathers expanded with joy and repletion ; the sight was very satisfactory to the *beatas*, every one was in admirable good humour, all but the unfortunate being in honour of whom the present feast had been prepared. With downcast, though placid looks, the unfortunate Theresa endured a scene of exquisite torture to her feelings. That she had no appetite it is needless to observe, but this circumstance entirely escaped the notice of the friars, for they were too much occupied with their own appetites to pay any regard to those of others. The orphan was besides very pale, and evinced in her countenance the incontrovertible proofs of weighty sorrow. But these trifles were also overlooked. The friars probably were not adepts in physiognomy, or at least they did not think the present time the most fit for investigations of the human countenance.

The friars were glad, and the *beatas* were glad, there was therefore an unusual quantity of gladness in the party ; and it mattered little if one solitary being did not display looks suitable to the occasion. A solitary cloud cannot dim the brilliancy of a fine, clear, sun-shining day. I am not sure whether this was the precise simile that occurred to the pious assembly, and I merely set it down here at a venture. Towards the end of the dinner, when Father Sinsforiano had sufficiently caressed his double chin, and when Father Caledonio had swallowed a tremendous draught, and when Father Francisco began to look immeasurably dull and saturnine for want of something else to do, Doña Tecla, in a soft, placid tone, put the following question—

"I hope, padres, my humble fare has not displeased you; and may it do you good, in the name of the Lord!"

The query being satisfactorily answered, a very learned discussion was entered upon, relating to the respective merits of Castilian and Andalusian wines. Many good and profound things were said in support of both sides of the question; but wise and good as they were, like many other good things, they cannot find room in this history.

Father Caledonio valiantly advocated the cause of Valdepeñas, while Father Sinsoriano took that of the Andalusian wines under his care. Father Francisco, who might have given the casting vote, strange to say, was alternately convinced by both parties. He invariably nodded approbation to the last speaker; a most honourable testimony, no doubt, of the weighty arguments produced by the disputants. The debate on wines being ultimately laid aside, Father Caledonio by some lucky chance alluded to the political change which had just taken place. This called forth a volley of simultaneous groans—not that Doña Tecla, Doña Petrona, or any other of the dames could make any distinction between the most opposite forms of government; but Father Sinsoriano had told them the most appalling things concerning those changes, which denunciations, though perfectly unintelligible to them, were still enough to awaken feelings of alarm.

The party were now rising from table highly satisfied with the good things which Doña Tecla had prepared, when they were surprised by a hard knocking at the door.

"Who can it be?" inquired Doña Tecla, very much puzzled, for the lady had a strange propensity to be easily puzzled.

This state of mind was not, however, allowed to be of long duration, for suddenly the door opened, and the curate of the parish, together with another individual, who looked amazingly like a ministrant of justice, made their appearance.

"Holy St. Joseph!" ejaculated the priest.

"*Virgen santissima!*" responded the party in chorus.

A pause followed, and Doña Tecla, who could not find at hand a question to put, thought it would be much better that the new comers should take upon themselves the trouble of opening the conversation. The padres looked grave at the intrusion, for as such they considered the present visit, since they knew the individuals did not make a part of their *tertulia*. There was, besides, in the face of the *funcionario*, something indicative of business, and certainly if such was the purport of the visit, the two emissaries could not have

chosen their time worse. The curate observing the deep silence which his appearance had created, did not tarry to unfold the object of his coming among them.

"Señora," he said, addressing Doña Tecla, "I must beg pardon for my intrusion, but I am here in virtue of my duty. Perhaps you would prefer that I should communicate my intelligence in private?"

"No, Señor Curá, by no means," answered, Doña Tecla, placidly, "these worthy persons are all especial friends, and I have no secret from them."

The *beatas*, who were by this time pretty far advanced in the high road of curiosity, now bestowed a shower of most grateful and approving looks on their kind friend for her discretion. The padres brought into the field an additional stock of gravity.

"Then," resumed the curate, "I am sorry to announce, Doña Tecla, that I come commissioned by high authority, to take away from your dwelling—"

A decided start from every one of the party interrupted the priest, who, however, soon continued.

"To take away from your dwelling a young maiden, an orphan, to whom your charity has afforded protection until now."

This came like a thunderbolt amid the party; a simultaneous groan issued from the oppressed throats of *padres* and dames. It was a most awful intelligence, and it came too at a most unseasonable hour. So unexpected a calamity might well enough produce the direst effects upon the digestive organs of the well-fed fathers. Padre Sinsforiano crossed himself, and Padre Caledonio fixed an ardent stare on the curate. Our readers have not, perhaps, forgotten the friar's capabilities in the staring line; the curate, however, preserved a composed gravity which could not be defeated even by the awful looks of half a dozen conventional stares.

In a few words, he again repeated the object of his mission. The tone and manner in which those few words were conveyed completely disconcerted every one of the party. As a last resource, they cast their eyes on Theresa, the dear object of all their solicitude, but the perverse girl, instead of sympathizing with their distress, which was suffered solely on her account, appeared extremely well satisfied with the turn which affairs had taken. A placid smile played on her lips,

for some inward whisper, some undefinable presentiment of good, suddenly threw a cheering light over the gloom of her desolate heart. She looked on the venerable figure of the worthy curate with implicit confidence—in him she beheld a rescuer from a fate which she had all along regarded with feelings of dread and abhorrence. She had given a consent in which her inclination had had no share. She was on the point of offering, not a willing tribute, but a lamentable sacrifice. The arrival of the consoling priest drove a crowd of darksome images from her mind, and her heart felt relieved from an oppressive load of sorrow. These workings were not concealed from the set of ghostly monitors, for Theresa took no care in disguising sentiments which were tainted with no particle of guilt or shame.

Such, indeed, was her opinion, and no doubt the opinion of every one who reads this history, but the sentiments of the fathers and *beatas* were immeasurably at variance with it. They saw what the orphan herself could not see,—and as they had her future welfare at heart, they looked with horror upon an occurrence which rendered that welfare problematical. They could not as yet surmise who was the secret contriver of this unexpected blow, but they naturally enough suspected Carlos to be the obnoxious person. He was accordingly regaled with sundry pious anathemas, pronounced *sotto voce*; for in the presence of strangers the devout coterie ventured not upon a more explicit method of testifying their chagrin and disappointment.

Despite of ominous looks and dismal groans, Theresa was carried away from Doña Tecla's residence. It is but justice to observe, however, that the separation from that lady was not effected without evident emotion on her part, as well as that of the young orphan. The rest of the party evinced no tender feeling of any kind; nay, they seemed, by their looks, to offer a silent rebuke to the good lady for the tears which she shed when Theresa approached to request a parting embrace. They very rationally concluded that Theresa, being so far engaged, ought to have presented a formal opposition to her quitting Doña Tecla's dwelling. The young woman was certainly to blame for disappointing, in this strange manner, so many worthy persons, after the incalculable pains they had taken to bring about her long wished-for separation from the pimp and dangers of a wicked world. It was this unfortunate event that called forth the ejaculations

at the beginning of this chapter—ejaculations which were no doubt followed by those keen remarks which holy fervour sometimes prompts in very zealous souls when they have been disappointed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BLOODY PLEDGE.

"He wants to see you immediately ;—he will not be denied."

"I can see no one at this moment."

"The man is so eager, I may say so imperious, that I don't know whether he'll take a denial ; he says, Señor Enriquez, that he comes on business of the greatest importance. Must I send him away ?"

"Stay, Vazquez—stay," said Enriquez, as if hesitating what course to adopt. "What kind of a man is he, that so eagerly requests to be admitted ?"

"Why, sir, as for his figure, 'tis none of the most engaging. St. Joseph deliver us from such a companion in a dark wintry night, say I."

"What is the name of the fellow ?"

"He would not give it."

A pause followed, and the gloomy brow of Enriquez began by degrees to relax, but only into a dark ferocious joy, still more terrible to behold.

"Perhaps 'tis he," he muttered with sullen pleasure ; "go, Vazquez, and bid the stranger come up—go—no, stay. Is the countess in her room ?"

"No, Señor Enriquez, she has gone out."

"'Tis well—show the man up."

The servant withdrew. The miscreant Enriquez had been disturbed in his fiendish reflections by the entrance of Vazquez. His mind was in a state of confusion difficult to be described. His calm malignity and strength of nerve, great as they were, appeared insufficient to drive away the presentiments of some approaching calamity, of whose

precise nature he could as yet form no idea. Since the moment he had assured himself past all doubt that the mysterious bidalgo was at Madrid, his coolness and daring seemed to have vanished—a thousand doubts and fears harassed his mind—the death of the unknown was indispensable, not only to the furtherance of his plans, but even to his personal safety ; and yet he now inwardly repented having entrusted El Zurdo with the horrible commission.

He looked on that *manolo* with a suspicious eye, and yet he was the man who, of all others, he deemed most apt for such desperate deeds. The influence which Enriquez held over the agonized mind of his unfortunate mistress he likewise perceived was miserably declining, his threats began to lose their distressing power—the countess appeared resolved to shake off the ignominious thraldom under which she suffered, even at the expense of public opinion or her life. Remorse seemed struggling in her bosom, but Enriquez trembled lest such a feeling should prevail.

These ideas threw him into a state of restless and incessant agitation. It was in this mood that the visit of the stranger was announced. Enriquez strove to assume an air of composure. The door opened, and a *manolo* entered the apartment. With the greatest freedom the fellow threw aside his cloak and hat, and then very leisurely took his seat. Enriquez recognised his worthy comrade El Zurdo.

"So you would not let me in, Señor Enriquez ?" quoth the villain, "by our Lady, 'tis a polite way to deal with your best friends, especially when they are doing their best to oblige you. I hate ingratitude."

"Well, Zurdo," replied Enriquez, "you must excuse my ignorance, more than pardon my ingratitude. I assure you I did not expect you at this hour."

"And why not this hour as well as any other?"

"Why, my good friend, I am always glad to see brave fellows like you—but I believe this is the first time you have ventured to call upon me—you know we always met near the *Buen retiro*; besides, there is great imprudence in the step, should you be discovered."

"Ay, you seem marvellously solicitous about my safety," returned El Zurdo, with a malicious grin, "but pardon me, if I suspect it to be your own prudence that urges you in this instance, not your friendship—what, Señor Enriquez, do you wish to play with fire and not burn your fingers ?

It is a difficult point, sir ; but enough of this, and now let us proceed to business."

" Well ! is the deed done ?" eagerly inquired Enriquez.

" It is," answered the *manolo*, with horrid tranquillity.

" The man you are sure is dead ?"

" Dead as my grandfather—*requiescat in pace*—but I can assure you, Señor Enriquez, it was no easy task to send his soul to purgatory. He was a shrewd, courageous fellow ; blessed be our Lady ! what a world of trouble it has given me ! It would not be too much if I were to receive twice the price for which I bargained."

Enriquez, at this welcome intelligence, indulged an unusual degree of ferocious joy and malignant tranquillity.

" I am safe," he muttered, with a demoniac smile, as he complacently surveyed the stout appalling figure of the *manolo*, who was now leisurely taking out of his pocket a tinder-box to light his *cigarillo*.

" Yes, you are safe," returned El Zurdo, " but I am not, and therefore the sooner you give me my money the better ; the climate of Madrid is getting rather too close for my constitution, and I fancy that a little trip into the northern provinces of Spain will materially improve my health. So, Señor Enriquez, I am ready to count the four thousand reals as soon as you please. Expedition is the soul of business."

Enriquez cast a scrutinizing look on the *manolo*, who now very imperturbably began to puff away the smoke of his cigar.

" My good friend," he then said, " it is very far from my mind to wish to defraud you of your lawful gain, but you know that before you receive the full pay for your trouble, a certain token must be put into my hands as a sure testimony of the transaction—a sort of receipt—for though I am far from suspecting your being capable of unfair dealing, you know that it is well to fulfil all the formalities attendant on business."

" Certainly, Señor Enriquez, I applaud your love of regularity—a bargain is a bargain—and I don't intend to shrink from our stipulated conditions."

" Well, then," coolly replied Enriquez, " let me have the token."

" It is but just," returned the *manolo* very calmly, putting his hand into his side between the *cenidor*, or red belt, which girded his waist. Enriquez bent his eyes eagerly, and watched every movement of his hand. El Zurdo drew forth

a linen rag stained with blood, and then leisurely unfolding it, showed to the gloating sight of the miscreant two ears, the bloody pledge required of him previous to receiving his guerdon.

"Well, Señor Enriquez," said El Zurdo, with freezing coolness, "are you satisfied now?—will you again mistrust the word of honourable and brave fellows? Here, accept this ardently wished-for token, and give me my due."

Saying this he carefully folded the rag, and then betook himself to his cigar, the operation of which had been momentarily suspended. Enriquez eagerly took the disgusting pledge, and with a face expanding with savage joy, bestowed an approving nod on the reckless *manolo*.

His fears were now completely dispelled, but still he very clearly perceived the expediency of making his accomplice and agent quit Madrid with all possible expedition. Under this impression he said—

"Zurdo, I highly approve your intention of visiting the northern provinces of Spain, as I am aware that the southern ones are but too well known to you already, and novelty is the charm of life, especially of a life like yours, so full of adventures. Follow me into this closet and you shall have your price."

Saying this he pointed to a little door. El Zurdo rose from his seat and obeyed; he was ushered into a narrow apartment, the sleeping chamber of his worthy employer. Enriquez opened a drawer where he kept a little chest which contained his money and other valuables. The eyes of the *manolo* glistened with anticipated pleasure; but money was not the only article contained therein, for two large pistols, ready cocked and prepared, seemed to keep sentinel over the miscreant's property.

"Ay, Señor Enriquez," said his companion, "you are a man of precaution, I see. Very pretty pistols these—not so good, however, as a well-edged *cuchillo*—commend me to that handy and expeditious weapon. These fire-arms I detest; they are like a parcel of women, they can do nothing without raising up a prodigious clatter. But each has his taste, and there are more ways than one of getting to Rome."

While the *manolo* was speaking, Enriquez began to count carefully the sum agreed upon for the deed of blood. El Zurdo sent many a wistful glance at the money, and God only knows what unholy thoughts may have crossed his mind.

at the moment ; without any great deviation from the laws of Christian charity, it might be suspected the *manolo* would rather have seen that display of wealth in a dark night and in a sequestered spot.

"Here's your money," said Enriquez, "but before we part tell me how the *thing* happened?"

"It was no easy matter, I can swear."

"Did he make any resistance?"

"No ; I gave him no time for that—the favour came upon him quite unexpectedly."

"Then how the devil could you have much trouble? Now, Zurdo, you impose upon me merely to enhance the merit of the affair ; I dare say you killed him with the same facility that you might have cut the throat of a lamb ; however, as I am an honourable man, there's the stipulated price."

"If you gave me double the sum it would not be too much. Blessed Virgin! what a world of trouble I have had to send the provoking man on the long journey ; three several times I had missed him ; at length I spied him taking a solitary ramble near the *Buen retiro*."

"And there you despatched him?" inquired Enriquez.

"After a whole hour's attendance on his leisure : that most troublesome young man, who has of late accompanied him, never forsook his side, so that I began to despair of being able to do the business without giving the said provoking companion a taste of the *cuchillo* also ; but there was rashness in the attempt, and therefore I strove to keep my impatience and courage under control."

"At length the two friends separated near the Puerta de Alcala—not a soul was near—the night, too, was peculiarly propitious—not a single spiteful star to tell tales—the moon closely cloaked not to catch cold, for the air was none of the gentlest."

"And what have you done with the corpse?"

"I have given it Christian burial, of course. Christian burial—that's to say, I said a prayer over it, and then performed the functions myself, and I am sure I have done it as well as any *sepultarero*, and, besides, there are no expenses to be defrayed."

"You are perfectly sure no one was near?"

"Do you think I am so very tired of my life as to expose myself to unnecessary danger?"

" Well, well, I think you are safe ; you'll not be hanged for this murder."

" And you ?" inquired El Zurdo, with a mixture of irony and jesting ; " talking of hanging, you know that there are ropes to fit various sorts of necks—that of the daring desperado like myself, as well as that of the diabolical plotting villain like you, *Senor Enriquez*. But let us not quarrel about our respective merits, for we have enough each of our own, without looking with a jealous eye on those of the other. And now, until we meet again, farewell—when you have a fancy to repent, I recommend to you the order of the Carthusian friars, for no life of penance short of that will do for either of us, eh?"

El Zurdo having received the price of his guilt, withdrew with the greatest *sang froid*, leaving his employer to indulge those hopes which had begun to droop. Enriquez gazed intently on the horrid pledge left him by the *manolo*, and then, with a smile of horrid satisfaction, he said :—

" Now let fortune do her worst ; I am safe—his murder will never come to light—a few days longer and I was for ever lost, but the blow is struck in time—dead men tell no tales. El Zurdo departs from this place—should he be inclined to betray me, his death will follow ; we are so closely linked together, that the ruin of the one involves that of the other. But a difficult step as yet remains to be taken—the haughty countess must be brought to accede to my wishes. I will so work upon her imagination—but soft—I hear a noise."

As he said this, he quickly locked the chest, and putting the key into his pocket, he left the place with assumed calmness. His joy could not be concealed from the servants—a symptom of congratulation to those wretches, who laboured under the greatest oppression ; for the unfortunate influence which the miscreant had assumed over the mistress of the mansion, was felt necessarily by every one of its inmates.

Enriquez now yielded himself to the most flattering illusions ; the change of government that was taking place in no way affected him, for he had succeeded in removing his victim from this world—the only mortal who could bring his iniquities to light, and seal his destruction.

CHAPTER XXIV.

▲ DISCOVERY.

It is now some time since our good friend Verdeflor has made his appearance, but that's no fault either of his or ours. The nature of events willed it that he should be kept in the back ground until the present moment. Since the dreadful *fracas* of the *banquero* with the countess, Don Marcos had judged it superfluous to bestow any attention on a young fellow of whom he stood no longer in want. In the poignancy of his disappointed hopes, the distressed *Tesorero-general* that was to be, behaved downright savagely with all his acquaintance. Verdeflor, unacquainted with the awful rupture, had once ventured to cross the threshold of the *banquero's* house, when another very animated skirmish took place, but as we have had too much quarrelling already, we will spare our readers this new instance of the lamentable effects of discord.

Suffice it to say, that Verdeflor, after bestowing the most unequivocal abuse on the thundering Cabezon, left his house, vowing never more to disgrace himself by visiting so great a bear. Perhaps Verdeflor had acted rashly and imprudently in making such a vow, so far, at least, as a worldly consideration is concerned. Don Marcos was rich, Verdeflor poor, and the *banquero*, apart from his monstrous follies, had some good points in his character, and might have assisted the young gentleman in his difficulties, if he could have contrived to put a little restraint upon his tongue. Verdeflor had been of late in a singular mood for emigration; in the short space of a week he had thrice changed his residence. So restless a disposition was certainly strange, even making due allowance for the volatile temperament of the young spark. But the fact is, that poor Verdeflor was sadly annoyed and pursued at the moment by some barbarous and pertinacious tradesmen, who had no more sympathy for the difficulties of a fashionable man than if he had been a dog.

This cruel persecution compelled Verdeflor, much against his inclination, to abstain from visiting his favourite haunts,

and to observe the greatest prudence in all his movements. His rambles therefore were chiefly taken at night. It was in one of these, that while musing soberly on his impoverished situation, and the means of bettering it, he was accosted by a stranger of respectable appearance. He turned suddenly, but the darkness would not permit him for some time to recognise the man who had addressed him by his name, though he thought he had some faint recollection of having heard that voice before.

"Who calls me?" said Verdeflor, "I know you not, señor."

"I beg your pardon for the intrusion, but depend upon it, my young friend, that it is no idle whim that prompts me to address you. I know something of you, strange as I may appear to you."

"Oh, you know something about me. I am very glad, señor—well, what about me? If you come on business, allow me to tell you this is not the most convenient place for such a purpose."

Verdeflor was not entirely at ease—the horrid visions of tailors, shoemakers, and *alguaciles*, that haunted his troubled imagination, now more vividly came before his fancy. He made a retrograde motion, for in case of a direct attack he was resolved to make a speedy retreat.

"Nay, señor," said the stranger, "do not permit ungenerous doubts to come across your mind. I come not to do you harm, but, on the contrary, am impelled by a very friendly motive to seek your company."

"The fact is, señor of the friendly motives," replied Verdeflor, "that I am no admirer of friendships contracted under such romantic circumstances as the present. You may be the very best man in the world—and I hope you are—but yet you must excuse me, if I decline any further intercourse with you, until—"

"You know me better," interrupted the stranger; "your wishes shall be immediately satisfied. Come closer, señor, and view me attentively—have you no recollection of having seen me before?"

A feeling of curiosity prompted Verdeflor to obey the invitation of the stranger. He approached, surveyed the countenance of the man, and to his unutterable surprise he found that he was the unknown, the mysterious being who had often puzzled his surmises.

"Yes, sir," said he, "I have seen you often; but I know not that there exists, or can exist any connexion between us two."

"There can," replied the *unknown*; "you are a generous, noble-minded fellow, and as such I am eager to cultivate your acquaintance."

"Now, sir, be pleased to tell me what you want," said Verdeflor, somewhat sharply; "I am not disposed to laugh at your jests at present. I make no doubt but you are an eccentric old gentleman—a merry buffoon, but consider that the night air is rather too sharp to allow me to listen to your witticisms. I know that I am a noble fellow, and I give you credit for your sagacity in having found it out, but this is all I can grant for the present. So, kind sir, I wish you a good night."

As he said, he made a movement to depart, but the *unknown* detained him by the arm. "Stay, sir," he said, eagerly, "I am your debtor, and I cannot let you depart without discharging—"

"My debtor!" interrupted Verdeflor, "'pon my soul, señor, that's something new to me. See how a man may be mistaken; I thought all along that I was the debtor, not you; but now that there is a proper understanding on the subject, I shall feel in no hurry to quit the company of so worthy a gentleman."

"Sir, strange as it may sound to you," continued the *unknown*, "you have done me essential service. One, indeed, that cannot be sufficiently remunerated, but which shall be most gratefully registered in my heart as long as I draw breath."

"Upon my honour, señor, I am vastly rejoiced to hear you express such sentiments; gratitude is indeed one of the most noble virtues, but really I cannot conceive what claim I can have upon yours."

"When you might have secured an independence, you were generous and delicate enough to reject it because—"

"Another whim came across my head. In the name of goodness, who are you, sir? It is not proper to be teasing me in this manner, for pardon me if I believe that you are amusing yourself at my expense."

"I will immediately remove all your doubts. You know Don Marcos Cabezon?"

"I do—a curious old dog, to be sure, but an honest man."

"Not always, sir," gravely replied the unknown.

"Well, I will not pretend to dispute the point with you."

"You were solicited to marry a poor friendless orphan who offered an obstacle to the foolish and ambitious schemes of this same Cabezon?"

"You are very well informed, sir—go on."

"You had an interview with the intended victim?"

"A very curious interview it was."

"And you had the manliness to follow the dictates of good feeling in preference to those of sordid interest?"

"Well, sir, and there is nothing very extraordinary in that. You seem to have but an indifferent idea of mankind, if so small a merit calls from you so great a sum of admiration."

"Perhaps, sir, I have strong motives not to be over charitable in my opinion of men—but this is foreign to our affair. Let me now inform you that by your generous conduct you have saved not only that orphan girl from unredeemable misery, but her father from the pangs of despair."

"Her father! Here's something new,—why if she is an orphan, how in the name of wonder can she have a father? Are you fond of paradoxes, sir?"

"Theresa has a father," continued the unknown, "and it will not be long ere she is locked in his tender embrace."

"I am exceedingly pleased at the intelligence, but where is the good old gentleman?"

"I am he," replied the mysterious hidalgo.

"Heaven defend us!" cried Verdeflor, staring the stranger in the face: then suddenly changing his tone, he proceeded; "Ha, ha! a capital joke, a father tumbling from the sky, in this romantic manner. Well, señor, I must say that you have a most lovely daughter, and I sincerely congratulate you on the possession of such a child. Upon my honour, I could have loved, adored, idolized Theresa if she had been so disposed, but I was not such a scoundrel as to adore a woman against her inclination. But, sir, since you are so well-informed, you needs must also know the miserable imprisonment of your daughter—she is closely guarded by a crowd of appalling *beatas* and uncouth friars, and—and—"

"Theresa is no longer at Doña Tecla's residence," said the unknown.

"Good news for my friend Carlos!—I suppose, sir, you also know every thing about Carlos?"

"I do."

"A capital good fellow Carlos, upon my word he is. I owe him a round sum of money, but then he owes me a vast quantity of friendship—system of compensation—Carlos—Oh, Carlos is a kind companion—only he wanted to kill me a few days ago—however, I forgive him—it was very natural, and after all, and—my dear sir, don't you think it is getting abominably cold?"

"It is, and I beg your pardon for having detained you so long; I have merely to add, that to-morrow all your debts shall be paid, and that a sufficient sum will be intrusted to you to enable you to set up again in an honourable way."

"You are vastly generous, señor, but I cannot see what right I have to so much kindness."

"What, sir! a price was offered to you for a dishonourable act, and you are surprised there should be a reward for a good one?"

"Nay, sir, a bad action has a price—a good one, none. Don't be astonished, señor, to see me serious—I am a strange being, I agree, but not a mercenary, paltry fellow. 'Tis true I have borrowed money from Carlos, but then he is my friend, my very particular friend, and therefore I think I can dispense with a little ceremony—he is rich, I am poor, and—"

"Well, sir," interrupted the mysterious stranger, "grant me the privilege of calling you my friend, and let every *peseta* that I transmit to you be only in the quality of a loan, until you are enabled to repay me."

"There is something in that, certainly—I would stifle a few scrupulous compunctions for the sake of your friendship, since that is to be obtained by accepting your money. Sir, you are a frank and liberal-minded man. I am also frank and liberal—liberal in professions, for unluckily that's all my stock. But upon my soul, sir, it is getting insufferably cold."

"Here is my card," said the unknown; "if you have nothing more important to occupy your leisure to-morrow—will you favour me with a call?"

"Sir, I shall be proud of cultivating an acquaintance with any gentleman like you—the father of Theresa too—a most amiable and beautiful girl. It must be vastly satisfactory to be the father of such a child. I should be enormously vain if I were such a father. Good night, sir,—there's ten o'clock striking—Carlos will be a devilish happy fellow—if—This sharp air is just the thing for pulmonary complaints—take

care of your lungs, señor—fortunately you have a good capa—and so have I—Good night."

Verdeflor now sped his way towards the *Calle de Alcala* at a very brisk pace. It is needless to say that he retired to his obscure habitation in a marvellous good humour, and firmly resolved to call early the next morning on his new friend. Meantime that friend bent his course in a more moderate step, well pleased with the open character of the young man whom he had resolved to protect as soon as he was himself out of the reach of danger, and in no want of protection on his side. The time was at hand when the enigma that enveloped this strange being would be explained. The unknown had nearly reached the *Puerta de Alcala* when he was suddenly joined by a cloaked individual who had been lurking about the place.

But we must not anticipate, and our readers must have a little patience, unless they have spent all their stock by this time. Persons, however, who are not blessed with a liberal share of this virtue ought never in conscience to venture upon the career of a *reader*.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHANGE OF DESTINY.

WHAT in the world can be compared to the comforts of a good, soft, warm bed? Let poets talk about the flowery fields and sparkling rivulets—lovers about their forests and their fountains, the still hour of eve, with the setting sun and the rest of twilight machinery—for my part, I verily believe that the best verses, as well as the best *billets-doux*, are composed in bed the halfhour before your eyes are sealed in sleep, or the half hour after you have awaked.

But I imagine that a good bed has attractions to other personages besides poets and lovers—one of those personages was most assuredly our friend Verdeflor. His head was not troubled either with rhymes or with love-thoughts, and yet he very industriously contrived to remain in bed till about

to live in the morning, unless he had indeed something particular to call his attention. At the present time, as we have already observed, the whole business of his life was limited to evade the merciless persecutions of barbarous creditors, a task which could certainly be performed much better by lying *perdu* in a retired corner, than by braving the danger of the principal streets of Madrid, where he was so well known.

I cannot tell how far this slothful sort of life agreed with the vivacious temperament of Verdeflor; but the fact is, that for some days past his small room had enjoyed more of his company than it was usual for any room (whatever might be its attractions) to be favoured with. A visible change took place and broke this disagreeable monotony: very early in the morning, the restless man was tossing back and forward in his bed in a state of the greatest excitement. He could not sleep, for the promises of the unknown had thrown his spirits into a high though very pleasing flutter, and it is certain that the anticipation of a great pleasure is as thoroughly a destroyer of sleep as the expectation of a great evil.

The sleep of Verdeflor being completely destroyed, he awaited with patience a decent hour to call on the mysterious individual. By eight he was dressed, and by ten already on his way to this intended visit. He knocked at the door of a very indifferent-looking house, was admitted and shown into a small apartment, where, instead of the unknown, he met his friend Cortante. They both started back with surprise at their unexpected meeting, but the astonishment of Verdeflor was doubly augmented as he perceived in the countenance of his friend evident signs of distress.

"Cortante, this is a strange meeting—how the deuce did you come here?"

"I think 'tis I who ought to put the question to you."

"Ah, my dear boy, I come by appointment; the unknown has taken a very singular fancy to me. Being a sharp man he has discovered that I am a monstrous good fellow, and being an honourable man, he is resolved to reward me, that is to say, to lend me wherewith to pay my debts. But you look amazingly serious—what's the matter with you?—Have you lost?—how much is it?"

"Bah! I seldom or never play."

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"So much the better if you are unlucky, so much the worse if—Some *affair de cœur*, I suppose."

"You suppose wrong—my heart is disengaged."

"Like mine—so much the better. Nothing in the world so pleasant as a disengaged heart, except a disengaged purse; well then, may I crave to know the reason of your ill-humour?"

"Verdeflor," said Cortante, in a grave tone, "your gaiety is out of time and place."

"How's that?"

"You have seen the mysterious being, and according to your words, you have good hopes that he was going to act the part of a friend towards you."

"Well," interrupted Verdeflor, eagerly, "and I hope the man does not turn out to be a rascal who has been making game of me; for by San Pedro, if he has, I shall serve him with a trick of my own."

"You are mistaken, and you wrong that individual if you suppose him for a moment capable of any thing but what is worthy and honourable. The promises which he has made to you will be fulfilled. He knows the whole of your history, and—"

"Who has afforded him so much valuable information?"

"Myself—your conduct towards the orphan Theresa, his darling-daughter, won for you the esteem and friendship of this persecuted and great man."

"Persecuted and great man! you excite my curiosity—who is then this *unknown*? You appear thoroughly acquainted with his person and history."

"I am! But the time has not quite arrived to give publicity to the secret, and dispel the mystery that envelopes this person."

"And where is he now? I came here by his own express invitation."

"You have hit upon the motive of my concern and alarm. I too am here by appointment."

"Very cavalier manner of treating his visitors, upon my word. He is an early riser, certainly."

"Tush, Verdeflor," said Cortante, with deep gloom, "the *unknown* has been out all the night—a thing unusual with him, and extraordinary, when I was to meet him here this morning, at nine, for important business."

" Nine ! why it is now near eleven—what can be the matter with the man ? "

" I shudder to think what may have been his fate."

" His fate ; in the name of goodness what do you mean ? "

" I have but small doubts that he has been murdered."

" Murdered ! " cried the astonished Verdeflor.

" Yes—his death was indispensable to the safety of a scoundrel, as well as to the tranquillity of an elevated criminal. It was unfortunate I could not be his companion yesterday, in his solitary ramble. I always warned him against his habit of walking alone, circumstanced as he was, and knowing, as he knew, that a thousand dangers threatened his person. You were the young man who was seen with him last night about ten."

" Yes, and I left him on account of the cold ; what became of him afterward, I know not."

" I do—the same person, who saw you with him, perceived that after you left him, he was joined by another individual closely cloaked, and whose appearance justified unfavourable suspicions—this man I have good reason to suspect was the same who had already crossed our path before—the ruffian has watched his opportunity, and made sure of his victim."

" But whence this hatred against this mysterious unknown ? "

" Verdeflor, ere long your curiosity shall be satisfied. Let us now by all means in our power endeavour to trace out the fate of our friend."

" I have no objection—but consider that I must not be too prodigal in exhibiting my precious self ; how provoking that a set of ill-natured, surly creditors, should come and impede the career of an honest man, when about to fulfil a sacred duty ! "

" In my company you shall have nothing to apprehend, I shall stand responsible for—"

" You will ?—upon my honour, you are an honourable fellow, and a sincere friend."

" We must see the *corregidor* immediately, and concert measures to come at the full knowledge of this iniquitous business."

After this colloquy the two young men left the house, and bent their steps to the *corregidor's*.

The suspicions of Cortante were not without foundation.

He had been made acquainted with the history of the *unknown*, and now with good reason trembled, lest he should have fallen by the treachery of his enemies. This catastrophe was the more deeply lamented by Gortante, as the change which had now taken place in the Spanish government permitted the mysterious *unknown* to throw off the *incognito*, and show himself in his real character. While the two young men were thus engaged, other individuals who have been conspicuous throughout this history were also in a state of excitement, produced however by very different causes.

We readily absolve our readers from the crime of undue forgetfulness of Don Marcos Cabeson ; for ourselves, though it is now some time since this meritorious individual has occupied our attention, it must not be inferred that he has been constantly absent from our thoughts. We could never be guilty of so glaring an injustice towards so great a *banquero*. He will perhaps be no worse for being left to a little repose, and remaining in the background ; but now that we are somewhat released from other matters, we return to our friend Don Marcos with alacrity. And happy indeed should we be, had we to recount any affairs of an agreeable nature concerning the *banquero* ; but, alas ! if ever we wish to observe the strict veracity of the historian, we are bound to say that Don Marcos was now in a state of mental excitement, bordering on distraction. Indeed his near relatives and the household had given it as their opinion, that the *banquero* had lost that strong sense for which he had been remarkable, and that if he continued in the same turn of mind, he would be compelled to change his residence for a *maison de santé*.

The fact is, that Don Marcos, since the memorable and tremendous, though short and pithy, rupture with the Countess of Belprado, had been perplexed and tormented with a series of mishaps, enough to vex the patience of a stoic and the resolution of a hero. It was not enough that the ill-used *banquero* had lost for ever the occupation of his day-dreams ; it was not enough that he was debarred the happiness of serving his country as a *Tesorero-general* ; and that he had lost the most remote hope of forming an alliance with rank and fashion : to this awful list of calamities were now superadded many others, distressing on the very highest degree. In the first place, the most unwarrantable calls

were continually made on his purse, a process the *banquero*, though a very liberal man, when he perceived it most unmercifully repeated, could not but consider as extremely annoying and monotonous. It was really surprising to see the army of tradesmen and others who poured from all sides, to harass, bewilder, and afflict the unfortunate *banquero*. Don Marcos felt shocked and indignant at this caballing against his peace and tranquillity. What could be the meaning of such promiscuous attacks; the servile wretches who were a few days before bowing to the ground and evincing all the marks of the most abject flattery and submission, now came with great bluster to demand their *due*, as they called it, as if it were really the due of the rascals to afflict an already too much afflicted *banquero*.

Don Marcos, in the turmoil of his conflicting thoughts and jarring feelings, could not account for so sudden and unexpected a change. But perhaps we might offer him a hint, to guide him in the process of investigating its real origin. Don Marcos had innocently imagined that only himself and his country were interested in the hopes of his becoming *Tesorero-general*. Now this was not the case—there were very many individuals, who, though humble in appearance, longed to see the wished-for consummation. It was in this agreeable anticipation that they had not been too hard in pressing their bills upon their generous debtor and patron, but bad news travels at an amazing quick pace. It was soon known that the wished-for consummation was not to take place, and that any more politeness towards the *banquero* would be equivalent to so much time lost. Such a waste is one of the greatest sins among men of business, and the *banquero's* creditors had piously resolved not to show any laxity of conscience in this respect—accordingly Don Marcos was favoured with a profusion of calls that had ultimately reduced him to the melancholy state we have already mentioned.

But this was not the only source of vexation to the harassed feelings of the unfortunate Cabezon. No; unluckily for his peace of mind—unluckily for the preservation of a philosophical temperament, he was cursed with a preaching brother—now this most unmerciful brother, when he perceived his afflicted relative immersed in sorrow, imagined that it was the most fit time of all to regale his ears with immeasurable and everlasting lectures. Don Deogracias

had charitably resolved to convert his worldly brother from his evil courses, as he called them, and it must be confessed that he set about the task with uncommon alacrity and earnestness. At the rate he went on, there is no doubt that he would ultimately compel his brother to be converted or to shoot himself. He was very assiduous in paying visits to the *banquero*, and he lost no opportunity of inculcating sundry very pious and very tantalizing maxims.

He of course ascribed the present state of the *banquero's* worldly concerns to his criminal negligence of the affairs of his soul ; he said that the hand of Providence was clearly visible in all this. He next would preach copiously on the necessity of altering his conduct, reprobated with much zeal the backwardness which Don Marcos had shown in meeting the pious wishes of his devout brother, more especially in the case of the chapel that was to be erected to the Virgin of Mercies ; and finally, Don Deogracias invariably terminated the session by an admirable peroration, in which he very reasonably concluded that the deplorable state of Spain, in matters of religion, was the necessary and sad effect of Napoleon's invasion.

All these speeches, though perfectly edifying in themselves, and delivered by Don Deogracias with peculiar emphasis and effect, were attended but with very indifferent success. It was no easy task to persuade and convince Don Marcos Cabezon, and he was now unfortunately in the very worst mood that a man can be in to lend himself with a good grace either to persuasion or conviction. It is not surprising, therefore, that these fraternal lectures were followed either by most unhandsome gapings from his incorrigible brother, or by an abrupt exit of the same individual from the house : thus the really unfortunate Don Marcos was every day in a fair way to go stark mad. The condition of his son, though not so deeply to be deplored, was miserable enough of all conscience. He had learned that Theresa had been taken by superior authority from Doña Tecla's residence ; but he was yet totally in the dark concerning the individual who had power so to act, and the reason that might actuate him to proceed in this manner. The mind of the young Cabezon was in a tumult of excitement ; he called at Aranjuez, but despite of all his exertions, could not obtain an interview with Theresa, nor learn what had been her ultimate fate. The air of mystery that enveloped the whole affair was to Carlos

a source of great astonishment ; but he continued with unremitted alacrity to use his strenuous endeavours to arrive at a complete knowledge of the whole transaction.

Meantime Theresa had suddenly passed from a state of unutterable misery to one of unbounded felicity. Soon after she had quitted the residence of Doña Tecla, she was placed under the care of an elderly lady, a widow-sister of the good curate, from whom she experienced every demonstration of kindness and affability. The very next day it was announced to her that she was about to receive a visit from the best friend she had in the world, and one that had indisputable claims over her. Theresa fondly imagined that this person could be no other than her lover, Carlos, and in joyful anticipation she prepared herself for the expected visit. At last the moment arrived, the orphan was summoned from her room, her heart beat high, a delicious excitement pervaded her mind, gayly she bounded down stairs—the door of the room opened—she entered—when lo ! instead of the dear and anxiously expected lover, instead of the young Don Carlos, she perceived that the gentleman who wished to see her was an elderly gentleman, of grave, though prepossessing appearance.

At sight of Theresa, the stranger's countenance expanded with a beam of proud joy ; he advanced towards her in a manner expressive of much tenderness. This was a singular mystery to the surprised orphan. The scene which followed soon after, it would be superfluous to describe ; suffice it to say, that the orphan, the helpless Theresa, found herself locked in the tender embrace of a fond father, that the secret of her birth was revealed to her, and that, instead of a helpless and unfortunate being, she was the daughter of an illustrious personage, and a descendant of a noble family. Her joy was lively, and more striking as it had been quite unexpected. Her father saw her again, and gave her strong hopes that in a few days she should make her appearance at Madrid, when he would have not only the will, but the power of effecting her future happiness. To this pleasing anticipation there was only one drawback, and that was the total ignorance in which she was kept with regard to Carlos, and the impossibility of acquainting him with the prosperous turn which her affairs had taken.

But this was considerably diminished by the consoling idea that the suspense could not be of long duration. She

therefore yielded her heart to the most flattering hopes, and every moment of the day saw her lovely face decked in the smiles of innocence and pure delight. But while such were the feelings of the orphan of Aranjuez, let us turn and examine what different sentiments overpowered the heart of one of the principal personages of this history. It is to the unfortunate Countess of Belprado that we now direct the attention of our readers.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MENTAL AGONY.

A SINGULAR change had recently taken place in the behaviour of the Countess of Belprado. Society had lost all its charms, and she no longer strove to outshine her rivals in the crowded saloons and other places of fashionable resort. Gradually her *tertulia* diminished, and the round of her visits was considerably contracted. Her temper had likewise undergone a strange revolution. Her pride and haughtiness had softened into a becoming dignity of deportment, and the despotic tone with which she had been accustomed to issue her commands, was lost in one of more affability, strangely at variance with her former manner.

She was observed to delight in solitude, and often would she pass whole hours closeted in her apartment. Her daughter was the only being whose company was not only tolerated but welcome. In her society the gloom which appeared settled in the countenance of the unfortunate countess vanished, and whatever might be the conflicting feelings swelling at her heart, the genuine flow of maternal tenderness seemed to shed a benignant influence over them. The mother's affection for her child daily grew more intense; for, alas! it is one, perhaps the only, privilege of sorrow, to endear those beings from whom we expect sympathy, and who are bound to us by the ties of blood and friendship. Paulita, though the victim of a pernicious education, and brought up and habituated to the destructive maxims and customs of an artificial world, had been blessed with an imagination and a feeling heart, which all the defects of her

education had not been sufficient to smother and destroy. She loved her mother sincerely, and the agony in which she saw her now plunged, gave a new stimulus to her affection, as well as to her powers of thinking. A material improvement was effected both in the mind and the heart of the young lady. The frivolous turn of her conversation, as well as the fashionable laxity of deportment, no longer found apology and imitation on her side.

She now perceived her mother, once the acknowledged star of the fashionable sphere, the leading feature in any gay and brilliant circle, labouring under evident depression, an agony of mind to which, perhaps, no obscure, no vulgar individual was ever condemned. This striking and melancholy picture deeply affected the mind of Paulita, and gave birth to a train of solitary reflections. This singular change in mother and daughter operated likewise upon the inferior inmates of the mansion; most of them a set of lazy, pampered knaves, very naturally quitted a place which was no longer congenial to their depraved habits. That temple of gaiety, and pomp, and pleasure, had become the chosen mansion of tranquillity and monotonous regularity. The household was therefore much reduced, and everything seemed to proceed upon a totally different footing. The miscreant Enriquez viewed these changes with evident displeasure. He could not get access to the countess as often as he wished, nor had his threats and appalling speeches the same effect as before. Yet his darksome heart, instead of yielding to despair from this circumstance, appeared secured in the success of some tremendous, some fiendish blow now in process of meditation.

We have seen the anxiety which he evinced until he was sure of the murder of the unknown on which not only his safety, but the success of his ulterior machinations seemed to depend. The crime once accomplished, the villain waited the moment of carrying into execution the horrid plans which he had in contemplation. Though the countess saw the unprincipled ruffian as seldom as possible, yet she perceived in his calm and composed manner, in his appalling yet scarcely perceptible sneer, that he had some catastrophe to dread, yet she firmly resolved to undergo the most poignant of torments, the most distressing pangs of shame, rather than submit to the wild proposals which she anticipated from the miscreant.

In this posture of affairs the countess returned home one day complaining of great pain in her head ; she was feverish, and her countenance evinced all the symptoms of an invading malady. Paulita persuaded her mother to retire to bed, to which, after some persuasion, she complied. She appeared excessively weak, and labouring under great excitement of mind. To the tender solicitude of her daughter she answered not by words, but a placid melancholy smile seemed to testify her gratitude for the kindness shown to her. Paulita sat by the bedside, and with tender anxiety watched every movement of her suffering mother. She observed that the countess was restless and uneasy—that she had something on her mind which she wished, yet dared not disclose. After a long pause of deep silence, Paulita saw that her mother had insensibly fallen asleep. She gently rose, but she perceived her suffering parent again awake, and her eyes suffused with tears of anguish and bitterness.

The daughter, powerfully affected at the sight, tenderly took the hand of the countess, and bathing it with her tears—

“ Oh ! my dear mother, my dear mother ! ” she said in a tone broken by sorrow—“ confide to your dear child the dreadful secret that robs you of your peace of mind. You once promised that ere long I should be made acquainted with the cause of your sorrow. Deny me no longer the privilege of offering consolation. Let me fulfil a sacred duty towards my afflicted, my good mother.”

“ Good ! ” interrupted the countess, in a tone of deep anguish. “ No, my child, no, I am not good—I have been—”

A heartrending groan smothered the rest of the sentence. Paulita was greatly struck at these strange words, yet she dared not remark upon them—a dismal pause ensued. The countess appeared dreadfully agitated—her bosom beat violently, and she turned restlessly on her couch—now and then a broken word escaped from her afflicted heart—then a murmur of pain—or a mournful cry came upon the ear of the disconsolate daughter.

But this gust of contending feelings gradually subsided, and the countess, exhausted with the fatigue of the distressing contest, seemed ready to fall into a gentle slumber. Sleep came not to snatch her from her misery. Her eyes were half shut, and she did not speak ; but this was owing to ex-

tenances of that economical habitation. The whole of the furniture consisted of a solitary stool, lame of one of its three legs, and a little dirty deal table, upon which there was a display of sundry miscellaneous articles, such as an old rusty knife, a piece of yellow wax-candle, a book of prayers, most greasy and ill-used, and a large apple in a very advanced state of decay. There was besides in the room a small brass crucifix by the bed of the friar, an old print of the Virgin, and another, gaudily coloured, of the patron saint of the convent. On one corner of the cell there was a fine collection of dust, thickly studded with *puntas* or ends of paper cigars; and to heighten the picturesque effect of the whole, there was a miserable cage suspended to the ceiling, the feathered tenant of which was quite as much a recluse as the owner of the cell. Indeed it was a bird unique in its species, for it would have been difficult to say to what tribe it belonged. It was at least a strict anchorite, and never ventured to disturb with its voice the awful and becoming stillness that reigned around. After a careful examination of this place, it is probable that Enriquez came to the conclusion to which most of our readers would no doubt have come—viz. that this was but an indifferent sample of the much boasted riches and comforts of the conventional life. And here it is proper to observe, by the way, that the mere fact of becoming a friar does not make a man either very rich or very happy, very sensual or very slothful, as is too generally believed; for if there are reverends who roll in all the luxuries of a pampered and sensual life, there are other poor wretches whose conditions would not be, in real comfort, much above that of the street beggar, and indeed I doubt whether the tattered mendicant would consent to the exchange.

As we cannot be accused of too strong a partiality towards friars, the more cause do we see to consider ourselves bound in conscience to make this necessary and proper distinction. Whether Fray Benito belonged to the latter class, we are not very certain, though it is past all doubt he did not belong to the former. But it often happens that there are fathers nowise fond of display, and who, affectionately cherishing the solid comforts of life, most philosophically despise what is mere empty show. After a quarter of an hour's delay on the part of Enriquez, Father Benito entered the cell. Our readers expect perhaps that we should enter into a full

from Madrid to some town on the coast of Andalusia; and the mildness of its climate, and the pleasantness of its situation, had decided her to pitch upon Malaga as the place of her future residence.

Her mind was, however, in a very wavering state; and it was not easy to imagine what resolution she would ultimately take. The listless indifference of her deportment increased. Paulita trembled more for this unnatural apathy than from the gusts of emotion and suffering that had a few days before afflicted her parent.

On the day that the miscreant Enriquez had received the bloody token of murder from his accomplice and agent, El Zurdo, the distress of the countess appeared to have augmented. Enriquez had intruded his odious person on the privacy of his wretched mistress, and that interview seemed to have produced in her mind the most distressing effects. In vain did Paulita strive to offer consolation; a bitter smile was the only return she could obtain for all her endearing attentions and soothing caresses. The Countess of Bel-prado was now in a state of calmness, but alas! it was the tranquillity of the dead. That same day, towards the evening, Enriquez directed his course in a hurried pace towards a convent, and desired to speak with Fray Benito, his relative. The porter desired him to mount to the father's cell. Enriquez obeyed, ascended to a narrow gallery with a row of small cells, one of which he gently pushed open and entered. Fray Benito was not in, and this circumstance gained the friar a hearty curse from his profane visiter; however, as it was indispensable to see him that night, he resolved to await with patience his arrival, as he knew that according to the rules of the convent, no friar could be absent after the *oracion*, unless with special permission, or in case of emergency, such as attending on dying persons, hospitals, &c. &c. Enriquez began to tremble lest the friar might be employed that very night, but being a sad rascal, and very skeptical withal, he most uncharitably gave harbour to thoughts derogatory to the Father's sanctity, for he suspected that other functions, besides attending on sick beds and hospitals, called the attention of the reverend in the *witching hour of night*.

Enriquez, to kill time, seated himself on the miserable substitute for a bed that occupied one-half of the narrow cell, and began carefully to survey the mobilier, and appar-

tenances of that economical habitation. The whole of the furniture consisted of a solitary stool, lame of one of its three legs, and a little dirty deal table, upon which there was a display of sundry miscellaneous articles, such as an old rusty knife, a piece of yellow wax-candle, a book of prayers, most greasy and ill-used, and a large apple in a very advanced state of decay. There was besides in the room a small brass crucifix by the bed of the friar, an old print of the Virgin, and another, gaudily coloured, of the patron saint of the convent. On one corner of the cell there was a fine collection of dust, thickly studded with *puntas* or ends of paper cigars; and to heighten the picturesque effect of the whole, there was a miserable cage suspended to the ceiling, the feathered tenant of which was quite as much a recluse as the owner of the cell. Indeed it was a bird unique in its species, for it would have been difficult to say to what tribe it belonged. It was at least a strict anchorite, and never ventured to disturb with its voice the awful and becoming stillness that reigned around. After a careful examination of the place, it is probable that Enriquez came to the conclusion to which most of our readers would no doubt have come : viz. that this was but an indifferent sample of the much boasted riches and comforts of the conventional life. And here it is proper to observe, by the way, that the mere fact of becoming a friar does not make a man either very rich or very happy, very sensual or very slothful, as is too generally believed; for if there are reverends who roll in all the luxuries of a pampered and sensual life, there are other poor wretches whose conditions would not be, in real comfort, much above that of the street beggar, and indeed I doubt whether the tattered mendicant would consent to the exchange.

As we cannot be accused of too strong a partiality towards friars, the more cause do we see to consider ourselves bound in conscience to make this necessary and proper distinction. Whether Fray Benito belonged to the latter class, we are not very certain, though it is past all doubt he did not belong to the former. But it often happens that there are fathers nowise fond of display, and who, affectionately cherishing the solid comforts of life, most philosophically despise what is mere empty show. After a quarter of an hour's delay on the part of Enriquez, Father Benito entered the cell. Our readers expect perhaps that we should enter into a full

from Madrid to some town on the coast of Andalusia; and the mildness of its climate, and the pleasantness of its situation, had decided her to pitch upon Malaga as the place of her future residence.

Her mind was, however, in a very waning state, and it was not easy to imagine what resolution she would ultimately take. The listless indifference of her deportment increased. Paulita trembled more for this unnatural apathy than from the gusts of emotion and suffering that had a few days before afflicted her parent.

On the day that the miscreant Enriquez had received the bloody token of murder from his accomplice and agent, El Zurdo, the distress of the countess appeared to have augmented. Enriquez had intruded his odious person on the privacy of his wretched mistress, and that interview seemed to have produced in her mind the most distressing effects. In vain did Paulita strive to offer consolation; a bitter smile was the only return she could obtain for all her endearing attentions and soothing caresses. The Countess of Bel-prado was now in a state of calmness, but alas! it was the tranquillity of the dead. That same day, towards the evening, Enriquez directed his course in a hurried pace towards a convent, and desired to speak with Fray Benito, his relative. The porter desired him to mount to the father's cell. Enriquez obeyed, ascended to a narrow gallery with a row of small cells, one of which he gently pushed open and entered. Fray Benito was not in, and this circumstance gained the friar a hearty curse from his profane visitor; however, as it was indispensable to see him that night, he resolved to await with patience his arrival, as he knew that according to the rules of the convent, no friar could be absent after the *oracion*, unless with special permission, or in case of emergency, such as attending on dying persons, hospitals, &c.c. Enriquez began to tremble lest the friar might be employed that very night, but being a sad rascal, and very skeptical withal, he most uncharitably gave harbour to thoughts derogatory to the Father's sanctity, for he suspected that other functions, besides attending on sick beds and hospitals, called the attention of the reverend in the *witching hour of night*.

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"She then pressed her daughter's hand with great emotion, and drawing her close to her, imprinted a kiss on her sorrowing face."

"Paulita," she then said with pain, "you will not hate me when this dreadful mystery is unravelled?"

"Do not, mother, injure me with such ungnerous doubts."

"Yes, this confession must be made—it will bring some relief to my mind! You will pity your poor mother?"

"Oh, I shall love her more."

The countess seemed for a moment as if summoning all her energy for some difficult and distressing task; but the effort appeared much too great for the state of debility and exhaustion under which she laboured; besides, a remnant of pride struggled fearfully with the sentiments of penitence which had fortunately dawned in her desolate heart. In this state of suspense she remained for a few minutes, when her mood was disturbed by a gentle knock at the door. Paulita rose to learn who was the intruder, and a moment after ushered in the physician. He prescribed to his patient and retired. Paulita continued near the bedside till late at night. Contrary to her expectations, her mother enjoyed several hours of deep and refreshing rest.

CHAPTER XXVII.

In two days the Countess of Belprado was so far recovered as to be advised to go out in order to contribute to her complete recovery. Her complaint having chiefly sprung from mental suffering, it was deemed advisable that she should endeavour to try the effect of a change of objects. From the violent state of agitation that tormented her, the countess had gradually sunk into a sort of listless apathy, a necessary result of her suffering and depression of spirits. The tender attentions of her daughter had indeed served to lessen her sorrows, but it was judged that time and a change of place could alone effect a radical cure in the unfortunate lady's health. She had signified her intention of removing

from Madrid to some town on the coast of Andalucia; and the mildness of its climate, and the pleasantness of its situation, had decided her to pitch upon Malaga as the place of her future residence.

Her mind was, however, in a very wavering state, and it was not easy to imagine what resolution she would ultimately take. The listless indifference of her deportment increased. Paulita trembled more for this unnatural apathy than from the gusts of emotion and suffering that had a few days before afflicted her parent.

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description of the friar, but in this they are mistaken. However, let them not suppose that Fray Benito answered to the generally received description of a reverend. He was neither very fat, rosy, rubicund, &c. &c.; but on the contrary, a lean, pallid, diminutive, middle-aged man, with sunken cheeks, and two little eyes deeply buried in the sockets, covered with two black, bushy eyebrows.

"*Sea Dios loado,*" ejaculated the friar, as he entered, and Enriquez having afforded the appropriate answer, the mass of penitence continued—

"Well, cousin, what brings you hither at this unseasonable hour?"

"Unseasonable hour! why, what caption is this, my most reverend cousin? It is scarcely half-past seven, with all due respect to your sanctity, I do not suppose I am trespassing too much on the time allotted for the discipline, and the mortification of the flesh. Yours indeed stands in no need of mortification; why, my poor Benito, you are as lean, dried, and bony as a herring. Well, let that pass, as you are to enjoy everlasting bliss in the other world, it is but just you should—"

"Hold, cousin! if thou comest here with the intention of indulging unseemly jests and mockery on religion, I must command you to cease, or quit the place."

"Hollo! don't get into your preachments, for I am myself in the most pleasant humour—and I came to solicit your services in the most happy of human events."

"And what is that?" inquired the friar, sullenly.

"A wedding."

"A wedding! and who is to be the bride?"

"One of the principal ladies in Madrid," returned Enriquez.

"Indeed!" interrupted the friar, with a lurid smile, "mayhap, then, she may bestow her charity on our poor convert."

"There's no doubt she will—much more so, when the bridegroom is a person who has a particular regard and veneration for you."

"And who is he?"

"Myself," very complacently answered Enriquez.

"Yourself! Blessed Virgin!" cried the astonished Fray Benito. "You marry one of the principal ladies in Madrid!"

"It is even so, but where is the wonder?" said Enriquez, proudly, "I am of gentle blood—and if fortune—curse on me!"

"Hold, cousin, this is no place to be profaned with curses." "I beg your pardon, reverend cousin. I have a very ugly habit certainly of using wicked words—but there is no doubt that marriage will produce a total reform in my conduct and words."

"Amen," responded the friar.

"I have chosen you," continued Enriquez, "to perform the marriage ceremony."

"If there be no impediment, and—"

"Impediment!" interrupted Enriquez, "what impediment can there be?—the lady is a widow—I a bachelor—we are no relations at all, much less kindred within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity—we wish to marry, and therefore who can hinder our wishes?"

"What is the name of the bride?" inquired Fray Benito.

"The Countess of Belprado."

"The Countess of Belprado, your mistress! *Jesus benito*," cried the friar with redoubled astonishment. "Is it possible that so great a lady should condescend to—"

"Condescend!" interrupted Enriquez, haughtily, "there is no condescension whatever in the case."

"Well, well," proceeded the friar, "since there is no impediment, I can see no objection to my performing the ceremony. When is the holy sacrament to be administered?"

"This very night."

"This night! why not in the day?"

"There are reasons for adopting this course."

"Have the bans been proclaimed?"

"No; the marriage must be celebrated in secret. Every thing is ready—the witness prepared—licence obtained, and nothing is wanting but a man of God to link us together and give his blessing; now I may as well have your blessing as that of any other reverend father, the Archbishop of Toledo not excepted."

"Cousin, this tone of levity is very objectionable here. Go and prepare yourself by holy prayer for the important ceremony. Meantime I will speak to the *padre Prior*, and obtain his permission."

"Well, my good cousin, I depend upon you—and in return you may depend upon me, that a substantial gift will

not be long in forthcoming. It is but just you should partake of my felicity."

"Nay, cousin, substantial gifts, as you call them, have but little attraction in my eyes."

"So it seems," quoth Enriquez, with an ironical laugh, "but do not be offended, for when I spoke of you, I meant the convent."

"That's a very different case," returned the friar; "I am always content to see the charity of the faithful extended to our poor convent."

"And a most praiseworthy sentiment it is, my reverend cousin," replied Enriquez, "and now farewell. I shall expect you in a couple of hours, or so."

"I will not fail—so depart in peace. Heaven be with you."

Saying this, the friar left the cell to see his superior, and Enriquez quitted the convent in the most satisfactory mood; at a short distance he was joined by two individuals, who by their demeanour appeared to have been waiting for him.

"Well, Enriquez, have you seen the friar?" inquired one of them.

"Yes, yes, he has promised to come—he can have no objection, and beside—"

"You have promised him something?"

"Not to him—to the convent; and as for you two, you know that I am not ungenerous towards my friends."

"We hope to see you so in the present case."

"Trust me, my good señores. Be at your post at the appointed time."

After this they separated, and Enriquez, at a brisk pace, hurried on to expedite every thing for the completion of his wishes. He at length conceived his triumph at hand, and he blessed the many crimes and villanies that had paved the way to his prosperity.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PATHETIC SCENE.

THE clock struck nine, and the Countess of Belprado had retired to her chamber. She had been during the day in a state of unnatural tranquillity, which had given her daughter serious cause for apprehension. The settled anguish expressed in her looks, and the corroding care stamped on her pallid forehead, were strangely at variance with the composed deportment and affable tone which that day marked the demeanour of the countess.

Paulita, in no little anxiety, had ventured to draw the conversation to the subject of her mother's sorrows, but the wretched parent had shown more than ordinary repugnance to enter upon it, much more to unburden herself as she had often promised. She seemed to shrink from it with inward dread, as if the shame and anguish were too great to be borne.

She was now in her solitary chamber, giving free scope to dark and harrowing thoughts. An hour had elapsed, when Paulita's emotion, too great to be restrained, led her with cautious step, again to approach the apartment of her mother.

The door was turned, but not shut; she ventured to open it a little, and to cast an anxious look within. She perceived her wretched mother seated by a table in an attitude of profound meditation. One hand supported her throbbing brow, whilst the other seemed to be pressing in its grasp a letter, which it appeared she had been recently writing. Paulita was painfully struck with the intense agony of those fixed and glazed eyes—that stillness of deep sorrow—that desolation of soul, which was conspicuous in the person of the unfortunate countess. At intervals she raised her melancholy head, and cast a look of anguish on a small clock placed on the table, and which, with its regular and monotonous sound, seemed to augment the gloominess of the scene.

Suddenly she was startled and rose from her seat. She

had heard some noise which, however gentle and scarcely perceptible, had been nevertheless sufficient to draw away her attention from the mournful reverie in which her whole soul seemed engrossed. The gentle sound that had disturbed her proceeded from her daughter. The countess, with a soft though steady tone of voice, inquired who was there?

"I beg pardon, mamma, it is only I."

"Come in, Paulita," said her mother, in an affectionate tone, "come in and shut the door after you."

Paulita obeyed, and the next moment was at the side of her afflicted parent. A long and painful pause ensued—the mother seemed completely abstracted, and the daughter trembled to heighten her misery by recurring to the subject of her woes—the clock struck ten, and the mournful sound again awoke the countess from her reverie. She cast a glance of mixed tenderness and pain on her child, and a deep groan issued from her breast, as she endearingly drew the weeping Paulita closer, until she locked her in her arms.

"Oh! my child! Let me enjoy the only comfort that left the most wretched of mothers, and," she added with gloom, "the most guilty of women. Let me press you to my agonizing heart—perhaps it is for the last time."

"Dear mamma," cried Paulita, with dread, "speak no such horrible words. Heaven will avert so fearful a calamity—the mere idea makes me sink with apprehension."

"Paulita," said her mother, with earnestness, "the idea of death would offer no terror to my sight—no—no, it would be pleasing and ardently welcome. Had I seen you established in the world, the pangs of my last moments would be less bitter and harrowing than they are likely to be."

"Last moments! Oh! my dearest mother, what fearful ideas fill your imagination. You are so far improved in your health, that the physician entertains not the most remote doubt of a speedy and total recovery. It is indeed only by indulging those gloomy fancies that you make yourself worse; could you but summon courage to dispel them from your mind, in a few, a very few days, you would be completely restored to health, to society, and I should be the most happy of human beings."

"You are a good, dear child, and this makes me more deeply regret my wrongs towards you!"

"Mention not that odious subject, dear mamma! Let not

the idea of lost wealth distress you. I have been giddy, frivolous, volatile, and accustomed to all the luxuries and vanities of this life, but I think I have sufficient courage to support, with noble pride, its reverses and difficulties?"

"Paulita," resumed her mother, in a more composed tone of voice, "take these papers; one is a letter to Don M——, the other a faithful account of my horrid story reserved for you; let me hope you will not curse me when its contents are known to you?"

Here a bitter sense of shame threw the wretched woman into one of her accustomed paroxysms. Paulita essayed to calm the agitation of her mind.

"Curse you! dear mother, could you suspect me guilty of so horrid, so unnatural a crime?"

"At all events," resumed the countess, "I will not be the witness of your agency at the dreaded discovery. No!" she added, firmly; "for it is my wish, my express command, that you open not these papers until your wretched mother shall be consigned to the grave."

"No! my dear mamma—rather let us burn these fearful documents, if you think they can for a moment lessen my love and gratitude to you—or inspire any sentiment of disrespect to your hallowed memory."

"No! Paulita, keep them, but observe my last dying request."

"Alas! my mother, why keep that gloomy idea so constantly in view?"

"It is the one most consonant with my present feelings."

"Heaven has in store many happy days for you."

The countess shook her head despondingly, while her eyes, oppressed with a heavy melancholy, were fixed on her consoling child.

"No! my child—no! something whispers in my heart that the close of my unfortunate career is at hand."

"But what do you apprehend?"
Alas! I cannot tell; an undefinable presentiment of evil is firmly rooted in my mind. It is vain that I call my reason to my aid, in order to dislodge the fearful idea. Now, my child, let me entreat you to retire to bed; you are in want of repose—your anxiety for your poor mother has had a mournful effect upon your health."

"No, no," answered Paulita, with a sad smile. "I am more robust, and capable of undergoing fatigue of every

kind, than you are aware of; allow me, therefore, to keep you company."

"No! I will not suffer it," said the countess, kindly.

Paulita insisted for some time, but she at length perceived that her mother was strongly bent on being left alone. With an oppressed heart and a starting tear, she accordingly said,

"Cruel as they are, I must obey your commands."

She arose to depart—her mother approached her with an indescribable emotion, and pressed her again to her bursting bosom. She hung for some time on her child's neck. She trembled in every limb—her agitation increased every moment. Her sobs ripened into deep moans, and a flood of tears came to relieve her labouring heart.

There was something prophetic in this strange scene of sorrow, and it was with a feeling of unconscious awe that the astonished Paulita contemplated its effects. At last, with one sudden effort, she disengaged herself from the tender embrace, and covering her face with her hands, made a motion for her daughter to withdraw. Paulita, in a tumult of grief, terror, and astonishment, slowly obeyed the tacit command, and retired to her chamber.

The countess, left alone, indulged for some time her absorbing grief, and when it at last abated, she was again plunged into her former gloomy and ominous reverie.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CATASTROPHE.

THE Countess of Belprado remained near an hour a prey to all the painful reflections which her wretched state of mind was calculated to produce. Her mind was fixed in a terrible mood of calmness. She seemed to be summoning up all her strength for some frightful event of which her desolate heart harboured a sad anticipation. Now and then her eyes were turned towards the door, as if in expectation of some visiter. That door at length opened, and Enriques presented himself to her view. She seemed however neither astonished nor indignant at the intrusion. She preserved a

dignified composure, and allowed the miscreant to approach without any comment upon his insolence and presumption.

Enriquez having shut the door after him with a tranquil step, advanced towards the countess. He then cast a suspicious look around him, and surveyed minutely every corner of the apartment. The countess, who, from the first moment she had seen him, had cast her eyes downwards, for the first time perceived the abhorred man was completely armed. After examining the room, and feeling secure that he was alone with the countess, he placed two pistols, ready cocked, upon the table, and then with perfect *sang froid* drew a chair and seated himself before his desponding and abased mistress.

"The moment is arrived, countess," he said, with a bitter smile, "and you see that I am punctual at the *rendezvous*."

"Yes," answered the countess, mournfully, casting upon the miscreant a look of mixed anger and scorn—"Yes, and you come in the guise that most becomes you—a mountain robber, on the point of surprising his victim; the midnight assassin, ready armed for crime, might well take lessons of precaution from you."

Then, with a hollow tone of frightful calmness, she added—

"Are you going to murder me?"

"Murder you, countess, no—no!" replied Enriquez, with a malignant smile. "I am not so dark a reprobate as that. Murder a lady from whom I have experienced so much kindness—such repeated and undeniable proofs of bounty! No, no! you cannot suppose me capable of such foul ingratitude. Let not the sight of those pistols alarm you. They will do no mischief of their own accord, and I of course cannot give them leave to act unless in case of extreme necessity, and that I am happy to believe is far removed as yet; however, you must not blame me for being a man of precaution, and preparing for the worst."

"Preparing for the worst!" said the countess, with emotion, "and why should such strange thoughts occupy your mind at this moment? Is it that you meditate another crime?"

"No, madam, I meditate no crime; but as I am no sorcerer, and consequently cannot foresee what events may take place, I please myself by being prepared for all contingencies. And now let us talk on the subject that brings me hither, for the moments fly apace, and we have none to lose."

"Your time and manner," interrupted the countess, "I must confess surprise me extremely, prepared and schooled as I have been to endure the bitter portion of your repeated affronts. You requested a secret interview this very night. You said that my life and honour were concerned—endangered, if I refused it—I yielded, I resolved to suffer this additional humiliation—not from the dread of death, which in my degraded state is the only consolation I can desire. No, I yielded because I myself had a proposal to make—Oh, heavens! that I should be sunk to this degree of degradation."

She paused, for the agitation of her feelings was becoming painfully overwhelming. Enriquez waited in silence the communication. After a short pause, the countess proceeded :

"Enriquez, of my shattered property, of the melancholy remains of my folly, and your unprincipled extortions, I am willing to sacrifice a part to thy avarice. The rest I must secure to my wronged and unfortunate daughter, whom I intend to place under the care of her uncle, Don M——. These last arrangements being completed, a convent will hide my shame and my miseries, until my eyes are closed in death; and some spirit whispers that this longed-for moment is not far off."

"God forbid it!" cried Enriquez, with mock compassion, "that, indeed, is a calamity which I sincerely trust is not so near as you imagine. With regard to your proposal, generous as it is, and no doubt kindly meant, allow me to observe that I most unequivocally decline it."

"What!" exclaimed the countess, in a tone of thrilling agony, "will not even that distressing sacrifice satisfy thy craving, thy sordid mind? Enriquez, art thou then dead to the last particle of human feeling! Oh, my God, how long will my torments endure! how severe the retribution on my guilt!"

"Madam," said Enriquez, sternly, "it is useless now to utter foolish regrets—if you have the clear judgment and good sense which I readily suppose you to possess, it ought to be your care to provide against future evils. With the unbending obstinacy, with the resolute cast of my character you must by this time be intimately acquainted, and you ought, therefore, to know that it will be a useless task to tamper with my will, or to try to conciliate me with any concea-

tion, short of what I have already submitted to your consideration."

"Can nothing satisfy thy cold, thy inhuman heart? Is it then possible that such dark ingratitude, cruelty, baseness, can exist united in one single being?"

"Madam, madam," coolly replied Enriquez, "your observations and entreaties are in vain. Why should you return to a task which experience ought to have taught you must be useless. Fate has linked us together, and inseparable must we be—to be the lord of your hand, as I *was once* of your affection, is, and has long been, my dream of ambition, and that dream I am resolved shall be realized; and—" he added, with a sarcastic sneer, "you know full well my means are not few, nor to be lightly despised. For the last time I come to tell you my unalterable, my unconquerable resolution—this very night you must be mine."

A heart-rending sigh was the only answer that the wretched lady gave to her tormentor's insolence. Enriquez continued:

"Every thing is now prepared for the ceremony—a friar and two witnesses are in attendance, and nothing remains but that you should allow yourself to be conducted to the altar."

"Never! never!" cried the countess, in convulsive grief.

"Well," resumed Enriquez, with horrid calmness, "the ceremony may be performed in this very place, if you prefer it."

"No, Enriquez, degraded as I am, I will not abase myself to such a consummation of disgrace and iniquity."

"You will think better of it," coolly replied the villain, "for when I place before you a true picture of the consequences of your stubbornness, perhaps your reason will induce you to adopt a more prudent course, and consent to stifle the proud scruples of your heart."

"Before I consent to this infamy, one of those pistols shall put a close to my degraded existence."

Enriquez removed the pistols from the reach of the despairing countess; for though he was extremely skeptical with regard to the threats and bravadoes of the sex, he yet well knew that a sudden impulse operates more powerfully upon a highly excited woman than upon the grosser, though stronger temperament of man.

"No, my dear lady, I will never suffer you to commit

murder, and surely you who are now so full of words of penitence, and entertain even thoughts of a convent, act in strange contradiction to the spirit of true religion, when you signify a wish to perpetrate the greatest of crimes."

"No crime can be more loathsome," replied the countess, with bitterness, "than the horrid deed you propose."

"Your pride, *señora*," quoth Enriquez, dryly, "is now, methinks, strangely misplaced, but time will teach you better, and you will accustom yourself to be a kind partner as well as a submissive wife."

"Wretch, forbear thy insulting threats—such infamy shall never be—I the companion, the degraded wife of a low-born villain!"

"Low-born villain!" cried Enriquez, with fierce emotion. "No, no, you utter a rank falsehood. Though dependent in station, you know full well I am not a low-born villain. Else," he added, with a fiendish sneer, "mayhap your pride would never have stooped to hear vows of adoration from a man, however sincere his attachment—however brilliant his qualifications, or incontestable his merits. But you are in my power—that power I am resolved to exert to the extreme, and it would be madness in you to offer opposition ineffectual as the puny efforts of the urchin against his superior in strength."

The countess was too much overwhelmed to offer any remark on the overbearing and insolent speeches of her dependant. She preserved a gloomy silence. Enriquez, after a pause, continued:—

"You affect to loathe and despise me, and why? because chance, that gave you fortune and rank, condemned me to push my way in the world by my own exertions. Despise me, forsooth!—rather reverence that energy, that profound wisdom that has procured me the power I now enjoy. Some, no doubt, still call me a villain, and you, perhaps, are of that number; but the time is at hand when my success will seal every mouth, and every one come to flatter and do homage to the man they once condemned. Lady, it is not crime that ruins man, but folly, and of this sin I shall always endeavour to steer clear. To affect a proud delicacy, a haughty demeanour, is now not only useless but ludicrous on your part. You will never recover from the blow which the secret in my power is so able to inflict, and to escape its keenest pangs, there is no other path but the one that leads

to the altar. Instead, therefore, of striving to lower the man that is to be your partner for life, you ought, in good policy, to shut your eyes to his defects, alive only to his merits—virtues, I should have said,” he added, sarcastically, “only that I am not acquainted with its precise and definite character ; the word admits of such various, and often of such contradictory interpretations. Now, señora, I have little more to say than that the die is cast, and that you must be mine this night, or prepare to undergo all the horrors of infamy, dishonour, and perhaps death.”

“ And all that—and more, yes, more,” shrieked the countess, in despair, “ would be preferable to your loathsome alternative.”

“ Loathsome alternative !” exclaimed Enriquez, with malignant mockery. “ Is this proper language to be addressed to him whom you once honoured with the title of your dearest friend ? Is your memory, then, completely dead to past scenes ? Am I not Enriquez—your beloved Enriquez, on whom you were prodigal of tenderness and affection. Look at me, that time is not yet so far removed as to justify your change of taste.”

“ Oh, Enriquez, in pity cease,” cried the countess, in agony, “ spare me, spare me the bitter, the horrible recollection.”

“ How you condescend to supplicate ! Where is your haughtiness gone ? But no, lady, learn that your entreaties will be as ineffectual as your threats—fate, or guilt if you prefer the name, has linked us together, and I am resolved to tighten the bond, until it is loosed by death. You must be mine, I repeat.”

“ Never ! never !” exclaimed the countess, with a voice of wild but resolute despair. “ Never, abominable fiend—let me suffer all the horrors consequent on my dereliction, rather than subject myself to the proposed infamy.”

“ Infamy ! woman, what have you been these fourteen years but my slave, my toy, the victim of my lordly will !”

“ Exult, fiend, exult over your guilt, and the misery you have wrought, revel in the wild and savage thoughts of your criminality. Recal all my shame and degradation. You succeed in making me hate, abhor myself as much as I loath you ; but, degraded as I am, I have still force to stop short in my career of guilt. Talk on, you can lacerate my heart, but you cannot, no, you can never conquer my mind.”

The resolute earnestness with which these words were pronounced, greatly disconcerted the miscreant Enriquez. He did not anticipate so unbending an opposition, for he had speculated largely upon the pride of the countess, and her nervous sensitiveness to the sting of shame. Despite, therefore, of her decided abhorrence to unite herself with him, and the repeated proofs of horror and disgust she invariably afforded whenever he attempted to bring the subject before her, he yet believed that she would ultimately bend before the all-powerful voice of necessity. But in the present determined tone of the countess, there was a chord that vibrated painfully on the villain's heart, and told that his hopes might yet be foiled.

In this perplexing situation Enriquez resolved to try a different course, and see what effect extreme violence and threats would produce upon his victim. Imminent fear is one of the greatest enemies of the sex—the feelings of women are more easily surprised than those of man, and she is often, perhaps, the dupe of sudden emotion, when taken unawares. Acting upon this principle, Enriquez, in a mood of great vehemence, suddenly seized one of the pistols, and advancing two steps towards the countess, cried out, in a tone of horrid fierceness—

“Consent, or look upon your death—sign that paper immediately”—as he said, he placed it on the table—“sign it within this minute, or the next you are a corpse.”

The countess, with an energy of mind, and a calmness of resolution almost inexplicable in her present situation, snatched the offered paper, and, without uttering a word, tore it into a thousand pieces. She then fixed an unappalled stare of mingled scorn and pride on the ruffian, who, now phrenesied with rage, levelled the pistols at his victim's breast.

“Fire!” cried the countess, with resolute calmness. “It is meet I should perish by your hand.”

Awed by the fearless tranquillity of the wretched lady, Enriquez stood for a moment wavering what course to pursue; a gathering cloud darkened his brow, his eyes glistened with the lurid fire of rage and disappointment; he perceived that his task was almost hopeless, but he would not abandon a scheme on which he had firmly placed all the wishes of his dark heart, and towards the completion of which he had incessantly exercised the powers of his criminal but powerful mind.

The Countess of Belprade remained unmoved, expecting every moment the decision of her fate, when a feeling of mingled repentance and enthusiasm coming to the aid of her first strong resolution, she resumed—

“ That illustrious man, that husband whom I have so deeply, so darkly wronged, that innocent husband, of whose sufferings and death I was the abominable cause, shall not, from the realms of light, where he now dwells, look with horror on the last guilt and abasement of his criminal and wretched wife. His awful shade has already come before my aching imagination—the sight curdled my blood, but it also offered a salutary memento to turn my steps, though, alas! too late, from the paths of crime and shame, to those of repentance.”

“ Lady,” said Enriquez, with a ferocious joy, “ the shade of that injured husband, whom you affect to invoke, ought to be a powerful inducement to oblige you to enter into new bonds of marriage. The poor shade cannot harm you, but—”

“ Hold, wretch! all thy diabolical insinuations are fruitless—what I am, I but too well know. Yes, I am a vile thing, destined now to the scorn of many—perhaps the pity of the few. Yes, my crimes are manifold and black—infidelity, adultery, perjury, the mention of those blasting words affords you a fiendish satisfaction, but the dread of discovery is past from the moment that a feeling of penitence superseded every worldly passion and sentiment.

“ Penitence!” cried Enriquez sneeringly,—“ Penitence! a fine sounding word for dupes and fools, and I certainly never gave you credit either for sanctimonious qualms, or foolish prejudices; but enough, you appear firmly determined to refuse my request—you know not however the extent, the direful extent of the horrors consequent on that refusal.”

“ I am prepared for all,” calmly replied the countess, “ rather than consent to this last offence.”

“ Know you,” resumed the miscreant, “ that I can lead you into a labyrinth of horror?—know you, I say, that to the crimes you have already committed, I can add a *supposed* one?—one more appalling than all the rest! Yes, I can prove you an accomplice in the murder of your husband, and bring you to a scaffold, since you scorn to accompany me to the altar!”

The countess was thunderstruck at the strange and horrid

assertion of the wicked man. She cast an incredulous look, and thought that it was a word, a subtle snare prepared for her credulity.

" You appear to be bewildered by my statement, and to treat it as a thing that cannot be ; but what if I afford such irrefragable proofs as to remove even the most stubborn and wilful incredulity ? "

" I am an accomplice in the *murder* of my husband ! " cried the affrighted countess. " He died in the Inquisition, fifteen years ago,—to cover my shame I yielded to your fiendish instigation, and I suffered my innocent husband to languish in those dark abodes for a crime of infidelity which he never committed. He died there of disease, but—not murdered."

" No, no," said Enriquez, in a hollow and ominous tone ; " No, he did not die in the Inquisition, nor was he drowned, as some foolishly imagined, in his passage to America, after his escape from the Holy Office. Learn a secret to strike you with chilling amazement : the husband whom you have thought dead these years, has all this time been a wanderer, a proscribed man. Yes, the powerful and highly gifted Count of Belprado—the object of my greatest abhorrence—was, a few days since, sound in health in this very town."

" Heavens ! " exclaimed the countess,—" No, no, it cannot be."

" It is," firmly replied Enriquez ; " under strict incognito, he has wandered into Madrid. A change in the government no doubt flattered his hopes that he would soon be restored to society, his innocence proclaimed, and all his rights finally re-established. But in his speculations he was miserably deceived, for despite of his prudence and precautions there was *one* too much interested in his ruin not to be vigilant to crush the growing hopes of the deluded count. You may believe me, señora," he continued, with a horrid smile, " I speak nothing but the truth,—the Count of Belprado was alive in Madrid two days ago."

" And now—where is he now ? " inquired the countess, with breathless anxiety.

" Now," replied the miscreant, with much serenity, " I cannot precisely tell, as I don't know the precise state of his soul when they gave it a passport for the other world ; but he must be in heaven, purgatory, or hell, as those are the three places, I am told, destined for us poor mortals."

"Merciful Heaven!" shrieked the countess, "he then was murdered!"

"He was killed by my order!" savagely returned the miscreant. "Our mutual safety required it so, and our mutual safety likewise demands that we should be united in marriage."

"Oh, villain! even above all the depths of crime, you wish to mock my deluded imagination—to harrow up the rankling wounds of remorse."

"I do not mean to make you my dupe, señora,—no, no, of whatever I assert, I shall always be ready to afford abundant and incontestable proof. Woman," he then added, "it is in vain to struggle against our common destiny; puny and foolish will be all your opposition, you cannot escape this alternative, but at the horrid expense of infamy and death."

"My choice is made," replied the countess, with resolute despair. "Begone, and strive no longer to awe my judgment, or startle my feelings into a base consent."

"Lady," calmly returned Enriquez, "you know not the extent of your danger, nor the intenseness of the manifold horrors that are reserved for you, if you persist in your wild and ridiculous sentiments. I can bring you before justice—lay open all your iniquities,—and it will be no difficult task to accuse you with success of being an accomplice in the murder of your husband. How will the brilliant and proud Countess of Belprado be able to endure the load of shame and public scorn that will lay so heavily upon her devoted head?"

A pause ensued, and Enriquez, in perfect calmness contemplated the impression which his words would make on the mind of the countess. A diabolical thought came then into his head. He resolved to overpower the unfortunate woman by a feeling of intense horror, which, mingled with the stormy and contending passions of her breast, might make her, in a trance of despair, determine on some violent step. He now clearly foresaw that his personal safety was completely destroyed, if the countess continued to feed the thoughts of noble daring and compunction that had lately so powerfully dawned in her breast: the miscreant, therefore, to awe her imagination, took from his pocket a folded piece of linen, and deliberately unfolding it discovered to the astonished and horrified countess the loathsome and frightful spectacle of two human ears."

"They belonged to the Count of Belprado," said Enri-

quez, with a fiendish sneer. " You wanted a proof of his death—here is one. He was killed by El Zurdo, by my command, and agreeable to my instruction. Now, lady, for the last time I warn you of the fearful doom that awaits you. I am determined to carry things to the utmost extremity. I know that I shall die the death of a felon, but I likewise know that your ruin will be involved in my own."

" Hold, monster! I free myself from your hated thraldom. Yes, I feel courage to follow—though too late, the dictates of a nobler spirit—take no trouble in denouncing your crimes and my own, for I myself will perform that task to-morrow."

The countess uttered these words with so resolute an expression, and such dignity of manner, that the miscreant, before so sanguine and determined, now saw his schemes completely foiled, and began seriously to tremble. A horrid gloom hung upon his brow—his malignant eyes shot a ghastly fire—his lip writhed into a sneer of horror.

There was for a moment a brief pause of intense thought; he perceived that he must abandon every hope, that the death of his unfortunate mistress must be resolved upon. He cast a terrible look towards the pistols, but there was too much danger to be feared in their explosion. He next be-thought himself of his poniard or *cuchillo*, which, though concealed, seldom quitted his side. He now fiercely grasped the murderous weapon, and advanced towards the countess with a determined step. She beheld him with a sort of fascinated terror mingled with undismayed resolution and frightful tranquillity. She uttered no shriek, no entreaty, no curse; one hollow concentrated moan alone escaped her breast. She thought her doom inevitable, yet she seemed indifferent as to avoiding it. At that moment approaching steps were heard near the door—the noise thus occasioned suddenly checked the miscreant in his diabolical purpose, and with a promptness of decision natural to his character, he altered his tone and composed himself. He supposed that the persons approaching were no doubt the friar and his two witnesses—the door suddenly burst open, and to the astonished, the affrighted vision of Enriquez, presented not his own companions, but the very form of the mysterious *unknown*, of the Count of Belprado, accompanied by his supposed murderer, El Zurdo, Cortante, and attendants. One short pause of intense horror ensued.

"I am betrayed!" muttered the miscreant, fiercely. "El Zurdo here! how's this?—to whom then do these cursed ears belong?" he added, holding them up to view.

"Why, to Pizpierno," replied El Zurdo, with perfect coolness.

"Then all is lost!" he said with concentrated rage.

The Countess of Belprado evinced her recognition of her injured husband by a deep and heart-rending cry. She seemed ready to sink overpowered into the earth; surprise, horror, and remorse riveted her to the spot.

"Yes, miscreant," said the Count of Belprado, "I am yet alive to bring thee to the dismal fate due to thy crimes."

"Say you so?" cried Enriquez, ferociously, fixing a rancorous look on the count, "then you at least shall not survive to rejoice over my fate."

Saying this, with fearful rapidity he seized one of the pistols, and with steady aim levelled the deadly weapon at the count. Fortunately it missed fire—the disappointed ruffian, afraid lest the same mischance might happen with regard to the other pistol, rushed suddenly upon the count, his poniard glaring in his hand: the countess uttered a piercing shriek, and with breathless promptitude threw herself between the assassin and her husband. The weapon pierced her bosom. She reeled one or two steps and fell, uttering a painful moan. The count, unarmed as he was, sprung upon the ruffian—but Enriquez, as soon as he perceived the catastrophe, had already decided his own fate. He had snatched the remaining pistol, and placing the muzzle into his mouth, was stretched the next moment dead upon the ground. Yet his eye seemed still to retain its ferocious glare upon his enemy. He had fallen near the countess, as if Providence had decreed that those partners in guilt should receive their award at the same time and in the same place. He expired with one convulsive gasp.

The spectators of this fearful tragedy, now hastened horror struck to afford help to the dying countess. The count and Cortante raised her from the floor, which was profusely stained with blood, and placed her, an almost lifeless burden, on the sofa. Her wound was mortal, and it was evident that she had but a few moments more to live. She seemed conscious of her fate, and completely resigned. The wretched woman fixed her dying and imploring looks on her husband, and with a feeble voice—a voice in the tone of

which the notes of death vibrated mournfully, she slowly said—

“Oh! pardon—pardon a wretched woman, once your honoured wife—Let the horror of my fate atone for the irregularities of my life, and my injustice to you. Reject not the dying prayer of repentance—pity my miseries while you condemn me.”

“Unfortunate, wretched Matilde,” answered the count, much affected by the frightful state in which he now beheld the partner of his younger days, whom he had once fondly, devotedly loved: “die in peace, I sincerely pardon you—may the blessings of Heaven accompany your departure from this world.”

“One more request,” said the countess, feebly; “injured as you have been, I still confide in your kindly feelings—your generosity.”

“Speak,” said the count, solemnly, “I will do all readily that may tend to soften the bitterness of your last moments. Matilde, speak, neither the sting of revenge, nor the instigations of pride, can efface in my heart the feelings of pity that your terrible fate so justly claims.”

“My daughter!” muttered, after a pause, the dying countess, in a tone of voice almost inarticulate through weakness—“Oh! my poor child, forsake her not.”

“I never will,” replied the count with firmness, “the cares and attentions of a father shall be lavishly bestowed upon her, as much as on my own Theresa!”

That name thrilled to the dying lady’s heart, and awoke painful recollections; her almost fleeting soul seemed suspended in its flight, as if awaiting some wished-for asseveration.

“Is she alive?” was all the countess could say.

“Yes,” replied her husband.

“Heaven be praised!”

The count had taken the hand of his dying wife and resolved to soothe her last moments as much as it lay in his power; he had evinced every mark of kindness. At that moment Paulita, who had been awakened by the report of the pistol, now rushed into the room, filled by this time with all the inmates of the house.

The sensations of the unfortunate girl when that scene of horror burst before her view, baffled all description. The remains of the miscreant, Enriquez, first struck her sight—

then, as she proceeded towards the group, near the sofa, an instinctive impulse of horror led her to start back. She saw her wretched mother in the last stage of her mortal career; the countess could no longer speak, and to the pirecing screams of her despairing daughter she could only answer with a look of mingled tenderness and sorrow. She made an effort to place her daughter's hand in that of the husband, then she fixed her last dying look on him, as if appealing to him not to forget his only promise, and uttering an oppressed murmur, she expired.

The bystanders were powerfully struck with this dismal scene. The wretched Paulita threw herself upon the body of her mother, and filled the room with heart-rending cries and lamentations. It was with great difficulty that the count at last succeeded in tearing her from the cold and lifeless burden she so firmly embraced. He then gave orders to take away the loathsome remains of Enriquez, and every trace of the mournful tragedy. The rest of that eventful night was passed in a state of speechless wretchedness; the scene had been so unexpected and so terrible in its effects, that it was long before those present could recover from the chilling trance into which they had been plunged. The Count of Belprado exhibited signs of the most sincere and lively sorrow for the fate of his guilty, but repentant, and once fondly adored Matilde, while his most benevolent feelings were excited towards the orphan Paulita; he had resolved to make no distinction between her and his own daughter Theresa. He endeavoured to soothe the overpowering sorrow of the wretched girl, but his efforts were for that night totally in vain.

Here let us close this painful scene, and permit our readers to breathe a little after the distressing and horrible events that have just been described. Nothing now remains but to acquaint them, in the ensuing chapter, with the lot of the several actors yet upon the stage.

years about different countries. At last he resolved to lay open his case before the king, and request that justice should be done to him. But, alas ! how could this be done without involving the ruin of his unfortunate wife, of whose irregularities he was aware, and whom he strongly suspected of having deposed against him. Besides he had many enemies who might succeed in thwarting the free course of justice. These considerations determined him to delay his plans until a fit opportunity. He however came to Spain—met Don Pedro Cortante at Granada, but alas ! only in time to receive his dying words. He nevertheless told him where Theresa was, for the woman of Ballecas entrusted the secret of Theresa's birth to another shortly before her death, who unfolded it to Don Pedro Cortante, then at Madrid. He however did not think it prudent to undertake any measures, until her own father should deem it fit. Besides, the orphan was perfectly well under the care of Doña Tecla Cabezon. The Count of Belprado meantime arrived at Madrid, but as all his papers were in order, and he was provided with a due passport, which designated him as a man travelling on commercial affairs through Spain, he met with no molestation from the authorities of the place. Chance made him acquainted with young Cortante, and it was in conjunction with him that he strove to learn every circumstance connected with his family.

His unexpected appearance alarmed El Zurdo. We have seen that he undertook to kill him—but when on the point of committing the crime, he thought he had better disclose the villainy and atrocity of Enriquez, for which important service his intended victim would in gratitude afford a competent reward. This was accordingly done, and the count resolved to remain concealed until the time proper for execution, so that Enriquez might really believe him dead. El Zurdo next very leisurely proceeded to defraud the mortal remains of his quondam rival Pizpierno of his, to him now useless ears, which rascally ears, as we have seen, were allowed the honour of personating those of an illustrious nobleman. The abolition of the Inquisition allowed the Count of Belprado to reappear in his own country ; he was fully acquainted with the atrocities of Enriquez, and he came at the dead of night to surprise the wretch in the last stage of his criminal career. On the dreadful scenes that followed his sudden appearance, and the recognition of the countess, it is needless to dwell.

CONCLUSION.

must now proceed to acquaint the reader with what, doubtless, is the most interesting portion of the work, viz., the happy union of Theresa with Carlos. By this, we clearly perceive the sense of due courtesy in the arrangement of such a marriage. Instead, however, of only one, we have in the benevolent and exemplary manner, resolved that there shall be two marriages. But, gently, we must not take more to ourselves than is strictly due; we certainly have had a hand in these marriages—we merely set down, as far as the veracity of historians, what took place.

The gratitude, however, is due to us, for we were not obliged to tell our readers that Paulita married Verdeflor after her mourning for her unfortunate mother was

This matrimonial news it must be confessed is a piece of tuitous good-nature on our part, for the imperious prescriptions of the novelist oblige him only either to kill or to kill the hero, heroiné, or both. As, however, we cannot but consider Verdeflor as a kind of hero, in his way, we must inform those of our readers who may feel some interest in his fate, that the Count of Belprado, having made his sacred promise, had adopted Paulita, and in every way treated her as his daughter. He soon discovered a *penchant* between her and Verdeflor—the consequence of marriage.

The fearful catastrophe of her unfortunate mother deeply impressed strongly upon the mind of Paulita, and gave quite a cast to her ulterior character and conduct. She was soon divested of that pernicious levity and freedom that marked her former life, and she made a tender and good wife in the matrimonial firm.

Here! this mercantile phrase has naturally enough brought up our old magnificent friend, Don Marcos Cabezon, in recollection. It is proper to observe that this patriotic soul was irrevocably deprived of his great hopes and ambitions of serving his country as a *Tesorero-general*. This was certainly a disappointment; but then, as a coun-

terpoise, he felt inexpressible pleasure in finding at last that he became allied to rank. His son had married a young countess, and that was enough. This piece of good fortune reconciled him to his disappointment, and, indeed, we see nothing very surprising in that; for if a man has two grand schemes in view, to see one of them prove successful is as much as he can reasonably expect *ici bas*. We must not, therefore, bestow more praise than is due on the *banquero's* resignation. No, no, this fine virtue was now more fully and justly exemplified in the conduct of another personage of the drama—we mean El Zurdo. It appeared that his last good action, in preserving the Count of Belprado, and unmasking the villain Enriquez, was not counterpoise enough for the sum of guilt that had distinguished his previous life. No, it would be establishing a very mischievous precedent, in this world of good and evil, to suppose that a man may be allowed to be cheating all along, and then to receive the thanks of the other players, because he happens to deviate from his wicked practice *once*, and that too in the expectation of being a gainer by the change. Certainly there are such things as repentance and contrition—most wholesome and commendable are they—but we conceive they are better in most cases for the other world than for this. El Zurdo was recognised—detected—his unjustifiable breach of good manners and confidence when he left Ceuta, with no other ceremony but taking what is called *French leave*, called for investigation. Several other matters were discovered which came under the cognizance of the police; the pugnacious propensities of the *manolo* were not always kept under proper restraint. The death of Pizpierno was the cause of his own. He was seen one night by an old woman (old women are peculiarly ominous), in the act of despoiling the unconscious Pizpierno of his auditory organs. Curiosity, a very natural thing in an old woman, led her to observe carefully what was going forward, and then she felt an anxious longing to discover the mystery, another very natural thing to an old woman; this led to a discovery of the murder, and by this means, it is evident that two women were the cause of El Zurdo's death—a young one and an old one. El Zurdo was hanged in the *Plazuela de la Cevada*. And this fate, we may here observe, serves two purposes; first, it illustrates poetical justice, which we cannot but consider at least as good as any other justice, abused as every thing

poetical is now-a-days, and secondly, it fulfils that strange dream with which Enriquez had been visited.

El Zurdo died with evident symptoms of repentance and great devotion. Devotion is an edifying thing in a criminal at the last stage of his life; but what must it be in a man, whose every stage of life was a continual rotation of devotion! Don Deogracias Cabezon, who claims such indisputable rights to those pious stages, continued to give proofs of his strong predilection for every thing appertaining to religious forms and pageantry. Indeed, despite of the sad effect of Napoleon's invasion, he never lost his laudable taste for a *nacimiento*. He was peculiarly gratified, moreover, when his brother, Don Marcos, on the occasion of his son's wedding, contributed liberally towards the building of the chapel to the Virgin of Mercies.

At that time the brothers were very happy; but, alas! just to show that unalloyed felicity is not to be expected here below, during the rejoicings of the wedding, Doña Tecla Cabezon was suddenly taken ill, and died a few days after. Alas! poor good lady, you preserved a marvellous consistency of character to the last breath. We have been informed that a liberal supply of sweetmeats and Malaga wine was in attendance for those visitors who came to inquire after her health. Father Caledonio attended her in her last moments. The fat, rosy reverend was slightly affected with the results of an indigestion, and the anxious Doña Tecla, being really a good kind of woman, all her acquaintances lamented her loss deeply. The *padres* and *beatas* might not, perhaps, be wholly disinterested in their regrets—perhaps, to the loss of a friend might be added that of good chocolate, and the *tertulia* with all its comforts and niceties. But the sorrow of Theresa was the genuine growth of a sincere heart, untainted with the least mark of self-interest, but that holy interest which springs solely from real affection.

We cannot tell what became of all the members of the late Doña Tecla's *tertulia*, but we may charitably suppose that they were all, especially the female portion of it, as solicitous about the conduct of young pretty women as ever. Carlos and Verdeflor led very happy lives with their lovely partners, at least, as far as we can judge from outward appearances. With the arcana of matrimonial proceedings

we are unacquainted, and, therefore, we attempt not to say a word on this subject.

If there be any one who cares at all for Cortante, we may inform him we know not where he is, or what can have become of him ; this is all the information we can afford, which, though certainly rather meager, we are apt to imagine will satisfy our readers. And now, ladies and gentlemen, I shall make a most respectful bow and retire, with all possible good wishes for your happiness. Let us only part good friends. *Sans adieu—au revoir.*

THE END.

LIBRARY
OR
SELECT NOVELS.

THERE is scarcely any question connected with the interests of literature which has been more thoroughly discussed and investigated than that of the utility or evil of novel reading. In its favour much may be and has been said, and it must be admitted that the reasonings of those who believe novels to be injurious, or at least useless, are not without force and plausibility. Yet, if the arguments against novels are closely examined, it will be found that they are more applicable in general to excessive indulgence in the pleasures afforded by the perusal of fictitious adventures than to the works themselves, and that the evils which can be justly ascribed to them arise almost exclusively, not from any peculiar noxious qualities that can be fairly attributed to novels as a species, but from those individual works which in their class must be pronounced bad or indifferent. It has been said, that from good novels and romances as much may be learned as from direct works of history and grave morality. In them the customs of countries, the transitions and shades of character, and even the very peculiarities of costume and dialect, are curiously preserved; and the imperishable spirit that surrounds and keeps them for the use of successive generations, renders the rarities for ever fresh and green. Fictitious composition is now admitted to form an extensive and important portion of litera-

ture. Well-wrought novels take their rank by the side of real narratives, and are appealed to as evidence in all questions concerning man. In them human life is laid down as in a map. The vivid exhibitions of passion and of character which they furnish, acquire and maintain the strongest hold upon the curiosity and, it may be added, the affections of every class of readers; for not only is entertainment in all the various moods of tragedy and comedy provided in their pages, but he who reads them attentively may often obtain, without the bitterness and danger of experience, that knowledge of his fellow-creatures which but for such aid could, in the majority of cases, be only acquired at a period of life when it would be too late to turn it to account.

But even were it otherwise—were novels of every kind, the good as well as the bad, the striking and animated not less than the puerile, indeed liable to the charge of enfeebling or perverting the mind; and were there no qualities in any which might render them instructive as well as amusing—the universal acceptance which they have ever received, and still continue to receive, from all ages and classes of men, would prove an irresistible incentive to their production. The remonstrances of moralists and the reasonings of philosophy have ever been, and will still be found, unavailing against the desire to partake of an enjoyment so attractive. Men will read novels; and therefore the utmost that wisdom and philanthropy can do is to cater prudently for the public appetite, and, as it is hopeless to attempt the exclusion of fictitious writings from the shelves of the library, to see that they are encumbered with the least possible number of such as have no other merit than that of novelty.

It is with this view that the publication of "The Library of Select Novels" is undertaken. The

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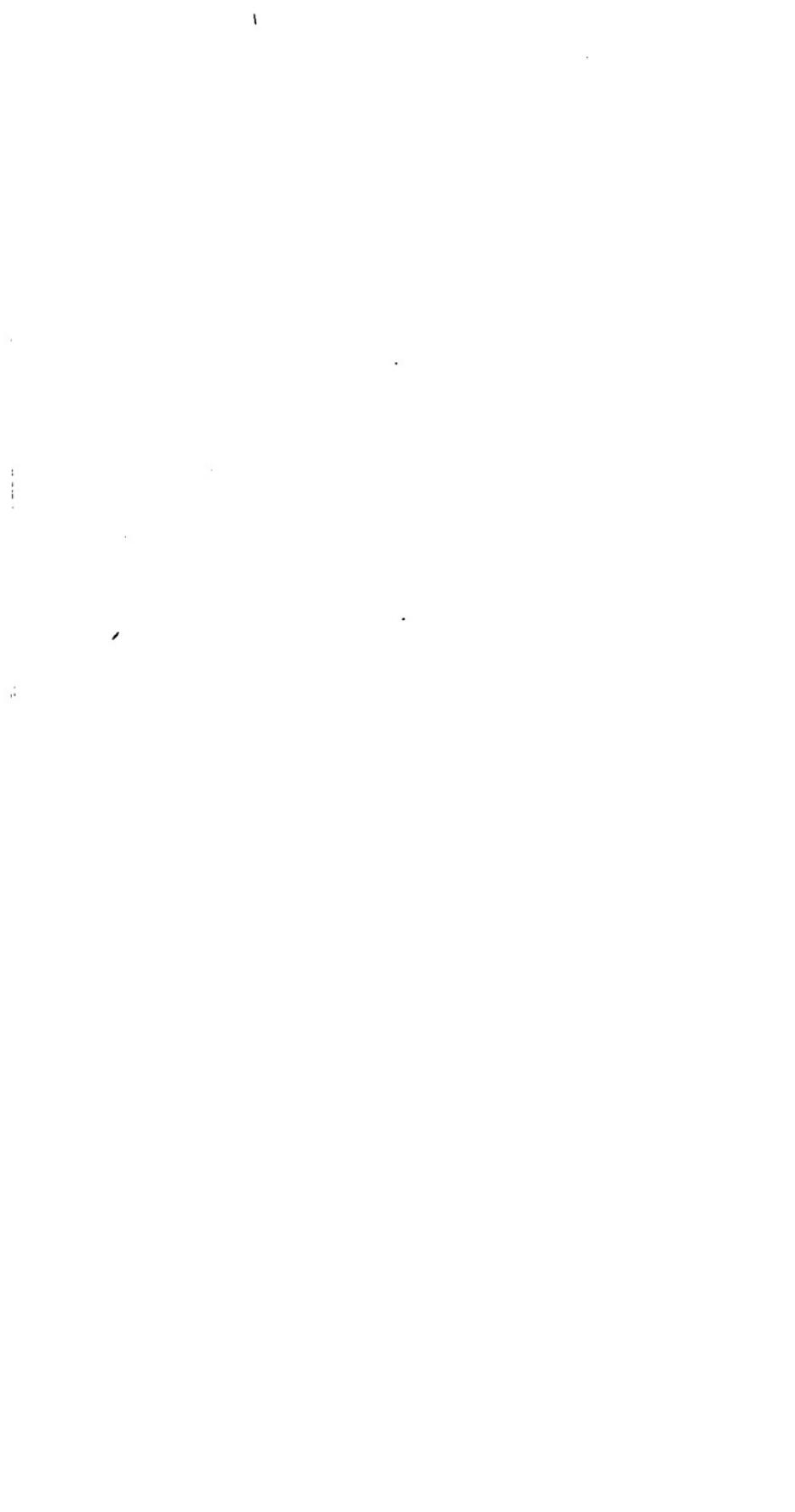
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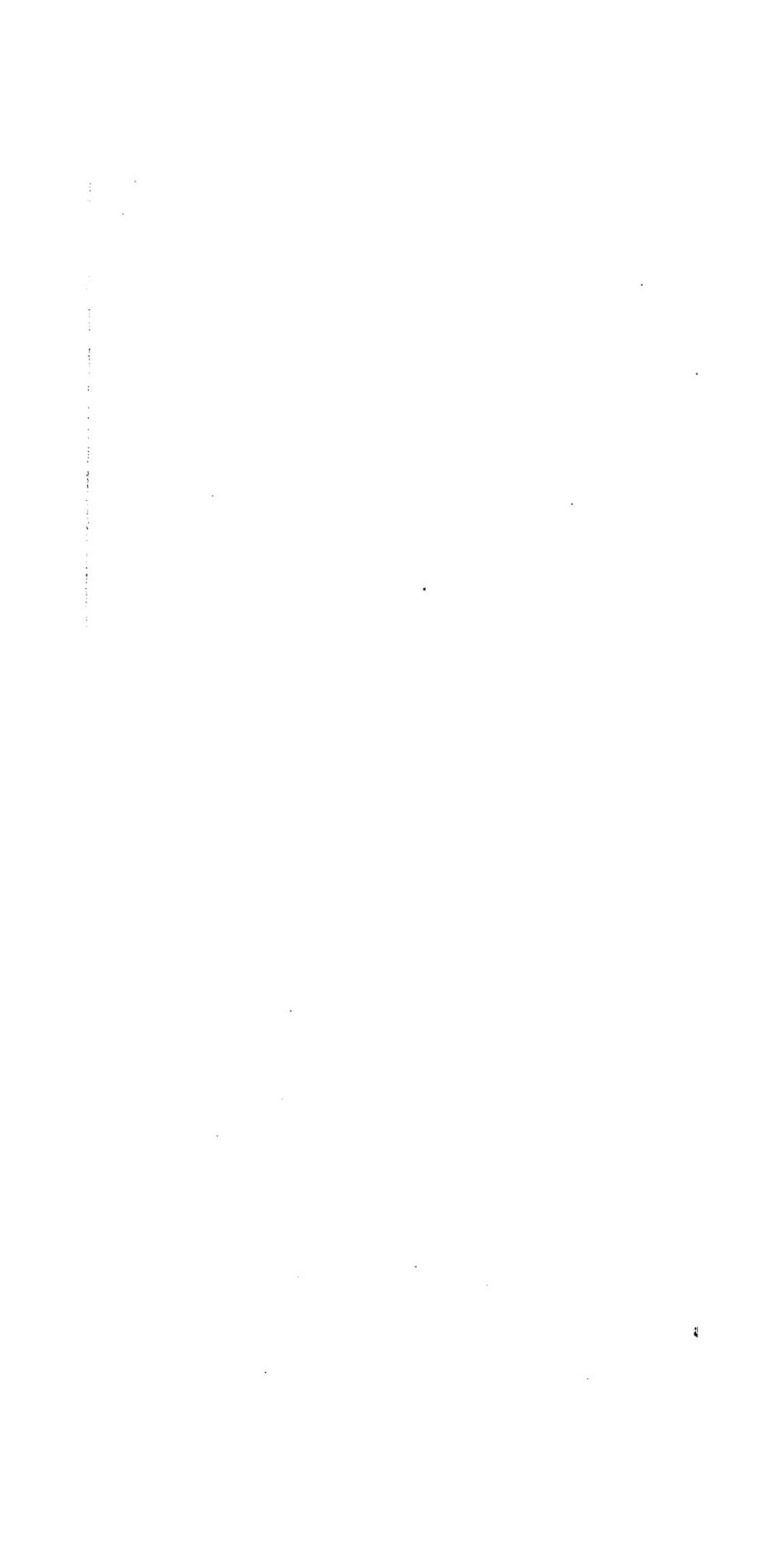
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